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TRANSLATED BY ALEXANDER BAKSHY

IN COLLABORATION WITH PAUL S. NATHAN

SEVEN PLAYS OF MAXIM GORKY

MAKSIM GORKY

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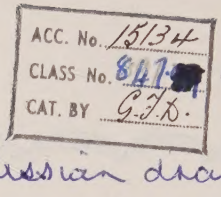

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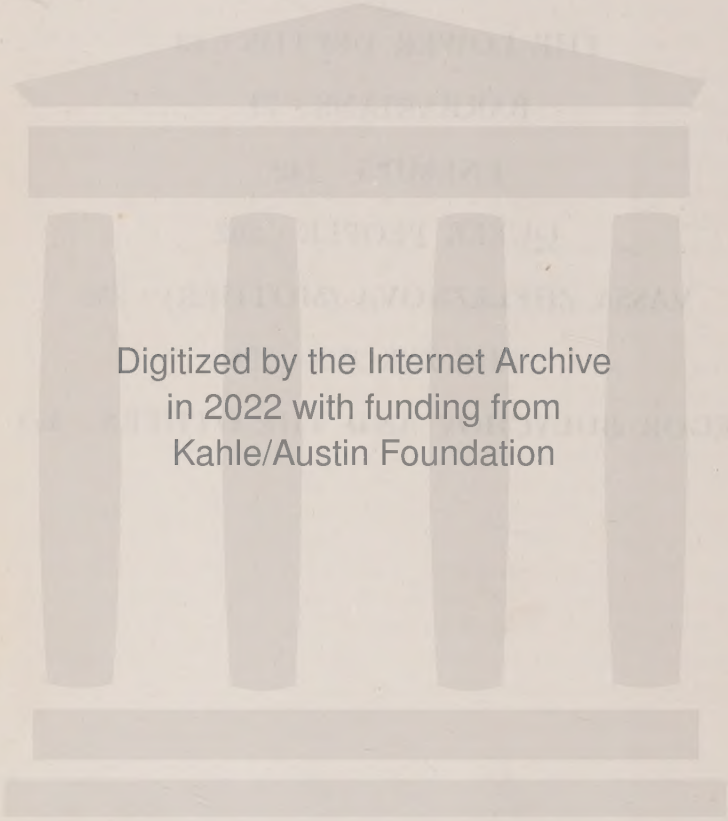

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SEVEN PLAYS OF MAXIM GORKY

THE THEATER OF MAXIM GORKY

MAXIM GORKY died in 1936, at the age of sixty-eight. Many great changes had taken place in Russia during his lifetime. When Gorky was born, in 1868, serfdom, abolished seven years before, was still fresh in everyone's memory. But new political and economic forces were already at work. The landowning class, which constituted the major part of the Russian "nobility," was in the process of differentiation and economic decline. Its social exclusiveness was being undermined, its dominance in the cultural life of the country was effectively challenged. The challenge came mostly from the educated section of the middle class, the so-called intelligentsia, which was growing in numbers, thanks to the extension of educational facilities and the influx of impoverished landowning nobility. Strong as the intelligentsia was —and it had won for itself a leading place in literature and the arts and was able to wage a successful war against the characteristic class-bred ethics, esthetics, and politics of the landowning class—it was too weak to impress its predominantly radical views on the entire country. Its most ambitious effort—an attempt by terrorist means to establish a democratic regime in Russia—failed disastrously. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 did not bring democracy to power. Instead, it ushered in a period of political and social reaction which reduced the intelligentsia to virtual impotence and put an end to all dreams of a swift transformation of Russia into a progressive country after the pattern of Western Europe. Recovery from the widespread disillusionment, frustration, and apathy did not come until the early 'nineties. By that time new social forces—a western-minded wealthy bourgeoisie and a growing working class, both products of the industrial development of the country—were slowly coming into play. Concurrently, the intellectual and political life of the nation began to show signs of awakening, and new, if long-distance, optimism was born.

The first short story by Gorky to attract national attention appeared in 1892, at the very opening of the new era. The young author, then twenty-four, was perhaps better versed in the realities of Russian life than most of the writing profession of his day. Brought up in the family of his grandfather, owner of a small dye works, in surroundings that were unspeakably crude and frequently brutal, he had, at an early age, been thrown on his own resources and worked hard, nearly always half starving, at one small job after another. He might well have ended as another shoemaker Alyoshka or locksmith Klestch, as he later pic-

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tured them in *The Lower Depths,* had it not been for his insatiable thirst for knowledge. Somehow he managed to educate himself sufficiently to become a copy clerk to a lawyer. The job was a "respectable" one, but it could give him little spiritual satisfaction, and eager to know the world he set out on a "grand tour" of Russia, tramping from his native Nijny Novgorod, on the upper Volga, all the way down to the southern Caucasus and back again. In those two years of vagabondage, he saw life shorn of its last vestiges of conventional culture, and shared company with the lowest derelicts of society. He returned to civilization to become a reporter on provincial newspapers, continuing on this path, with occasional intervals in jail for association with revolutionists and expressing injudiciously outspoken opinions, until the popularity of his short stories permitted him to concentrate his efforts on creative writing.

With that early experience behind him, it was natural that Gorky should grow up a rebel. His rebellion was directed as much against the conditions which condemned large sections of the population to a life of squalor and human degradation as against the intelligentsia, which had lost its larger vision of life, its sense of the heroic, and was content to bury itself in the prosaic tasks of personal well-being and professional work. In story after story Gorky pictured the world of social derelicts and outcasts whose very existence was a reproof to the existing social order, but who, surprisingly enough, were portrayed as superior beings rising above their melancholy condition to give free play to their passions, to pour contempt on the weak and the squeamish, and to glory in their personal power and their freedom from conventional restraints. These highly romanticized Russian counterparts of the American tramp struck the imagination of the Russian public. Gorky became the symbol of revolutionary protest against the existing society, and his popularity, particularly with the younger generation, bordered on idolatry.

It was at the peak of his literary fame that Gorky made his debut as a dramatist. The play was "The Smug Citizens," * produced by the Moscow Art Theater in 1902. In retrospect, it does not seem to be an important work. But it had certain significant features which at the time insured its success with the public (if not so greatly with the critics). Its attack on the Philistine concern with comfortable living and on the lack of a clear purpose in life even among those who longed for something better than creature comforts was in line with Gorky's denunciations in his earlier stories and found a quick response in his audience. The other significant feature of the play was the portrait of a worker as a being superior to the average intellectual. This progenitor of all proletarian heroes in Russian literature possessed practical idealism, knew what he wanted, and had the will power to realize his aims. By that time Marxism had gained a large following among

* "The Smug Citizens," translated by E. Hopkins, *Poet Lore,* 1906.

the intelligentsia and Gorky's glorification of the worker won him added acclaim in revolutionary circles.

Gorky himself, however, was far from pleased with his first play. He wrote to Chekhov after completing it: "Well, the play has turned out to be clamorous and bustling and, it seems, empty and dull. I dislike it very much. This very winter I will without fail write another play. And if that does not come off well, I'll write ten more until I get what I want! It has to be finely proportioned and beautiful like music."

The reference to music was no doubt a reflection of Gorky's admiration for Chekhov's plays. To a remarkable degree he achieved this quality of music in his second play, "At the Bottom" (better known in English as "The Lower Depths"), but it is music which springs from the interplay of brilliantly expressed ideas and striking characterizations, and not, as with Chekhov, from the lyrical emotion which envelops the action. Produced by the Moscow Art Theater in 1902, the play was a resounding success with the public. The critics were far more grudging in their approval. What worried them most was the play's "message." Was old Luka, the soft-spoken dispenser of comforting lies, to be regarded as Gorky's mouthpiece, and were his ideas to be taken seriously? The heated controversy over the moral issues involved left little room for appreciation of the fact that "The Lower Depths" is a remarkable work of art, surging with a life of its own, presenting characters that are unique on the Russian stage, and distinguished by an epigrammatic brilliance that is matched in Russian drama only by Griboyedov's "Wit Works Woe" and Gogol's "The Inspector General."

It cannot be said that "The Lower Depths" is a flawless masterpiece. But only Chekhov was able to lay his finger on the flaws that really mattered. In a letter to Gorky he wrote:

"You have removed the most interesting characters (except the actor) from the fourth act, and now beware lest something happen because of that. This act may appear dull and unnecessary, particularly if with the departure of the stronger and more interesting actors, only the mediocre ones stay on.* The actor's death is terrible—it is as if you were hitting the spectator on the head all of a sudden without preparing him for it. How the Baron has got into the night lodgings and why he is a baron is not made sufficiently clear either."

Gorky did not listen to Chekhov's advice and left the fourth act as he had written it. But Chekhov was unquestionably right—in point of action the last act is anticlimactic; and it is saved from being dull mainly by Satin's speeches, the sort of rhetoric for which Chekhov, with his reverence for simplicity of writing, had little liking. A sidelight on Gorky's love of epigrammatic paradoxes, in which "The

* Reference to the proposed casting of parts at the Moscow Art Theater. A. B.

Lower Depths" is particularly rich, appears in a letter, written by Gorky to K. Chukovsky, a well-known Russian critic, some twenty years later. In that letter Gorky says:

"You are unquestionably right when you say Wilde's paradoxes are 'commonplaces turned inside out.' But don't you consider it possible that this tendency to turn all commonplaces inside out conceals a more or less conscious desire to spite Mrs. Grundy and undermine English puritanism? In my opinion such phenomena as Wilde and Bernard Shaw are most surprising for the England of the end of the nineteenth century; nevertheless they are wholly natural—English hypocrisy is the best organized hypocrisy, and I regard paradoxes in the sphere of morals as a legitimate weapon in the struggle against puritanism."

Remembering Gorky's contempt for native Russian Philistinism, one begins to understand the motive that lay behind the quips and far-fetched ridicule that he directed against it. There is a great deal of this contempt and ridicule in the portraits of various types of the intelligentsia which he painted in his next four plays: "Summer-folk" * (1903), "The Children of the Sun" † (1905), "Barbarians" (1906), and "Enemies" (1906).

The years during which these plays were written were marked by a growing political tension in Russia. The labor movement showed unexpected strength in a wave of strikes and demonstrations that swept the country in 1903, despite the government's resort to arrests and shootings. The war against Japan (1904–5) dragged on ingloriously, bringing to light the corrupt practices of the ruling clique and exposing the incompetence of the Russian military leadership. "Bloody Sunday" (January, 1905) shocked Russia as well as the rest of the world by the brutality with which the government shot hundreds of workers for presuming to march, under the leadership of a priest, to the Tsar's palace in order to submit a petition for amelioration of their lot. The mutiny in the Black Sea navy, which immortalized the battle cruiser *Potemkin,* disclosed the spread of revolutionary ideas among the very groups which were the mainstay of the Tsarist regime. The climax came with the national strike of October, 1905, which forced the Tsar to promise political freedom and a parliamentary government. That historic upheaval is better remembered today as "the abortive revolution of 1905," for the Tsar's government went back on most of his promises and continued on the path that twelve years later brought an end to the regime it headed.

Gorky did not watch this march of events from the sidelines. Busy as he was with his plays and novels, he did all he could to advance the cause of the common people. His political sympathies turned more and more toward the Marxist Social Democratic party, and par-

* "Summer-folk," translated by Aline Delano, *Poet Lore,* 1905.
† "The Children of the Sun," translated by A. J. Wolf, *Poet Lore,* 1906.

ticularly to its Left wing which was led by Lenin. But on a few occasions his intervention was more active. He joined in a direct appeal to the leaders of the government in an attempt to prevent the butchery of Bloody Sunday and was jailed for his part in that effort. (It was while in jail, incidentally, that he wrote "The Children of the Sun.") He also gave active help to the revolutionists during the unsuccessful insurrection in Moscow in December, 1905, after which, expecting to be arrested, he hastened to leave Russia, remaining a political émigré abroad for the next eight years. (An episode in the latter period was his visit to America, where he was evicted from a hotel because he was not formally married to the lady who accompanied him as his wife.)

Gorky's political sympathies naturally found expression in the four plays he wrote during those years. In "Summer-folk" he castigated the intelligentsia for its Philistinism and futility. In "The Children of the Sun" he stressed the gulf that separated the intelligentsia from the common folk, who carried their distrust of the more privileged and educated to the point of mob violence. In "Barbarians" representatives of the intelligentsia were treated with ill-disguised sarcasm. And finally, in "Enemies" the wealthier section of the intelligentsia was bitterly assailed for the prejudice and hostility, inspired by selfish class interests, which it displayed toward the workers.

No doubt Gorky's political views are much in evidence in these four plays. But the plays, particularly "Barbarians" and "The Children of the Sun," and to a lesser degree "Enemies," have qualities of characterization that rise far above their political and moral message. In the struggle between social philosophies, which assumed great intensity during that stormy period, these qualities were largely overlooked and the majority of the intelligentsia, rising in defense of their own political and moral integrity, not only denounced the plays as libelous, but went even farther by declaring them to be utterly devoid of artistic value. In fact, after the publication of "Enemies," the cry went up that Gorky was finished as a writer. "The End of Gorky" was the title of an article by a noted liberal writer. "The coming cad" was the phrase used by another even more famous critic and novelist who branded thus the materialist, nihilist, and atheist heroes of Gorky's early stories, including "The Lower Depths."

"Summer-folk," perhaps the weakest of Gorky's plays, was condemned by the critics. But what they objected to was not so much its long-winded discussions of the meaning of life as its uncomplimentary portraits of various representatives of the intelligentsia. Among the advocates of art for art's sake the play was dismissed for other reasons. " 'Summer-folk,' " wrote one of them, "does not rise above the level of commonplace mediocrity. Most unpleasantly it resembles the plays of Chekhov."

"The Children of the Sun" had a more favorable reception, proba-

bly because it did not attack the intelligentsia but rather deplored their lack of contact with the low-born and ignorant common folk who lived by their side and on whom they depended for their comforts. Yet "Barbarians," a much stronger play and one of Gorky's best, was greeted with sad shakings of the head.

Here is a characteristic comment by A. Kugel, a popular dramatic critic of the time:

"The lack of theatrical quality in Gorky's plays is explained not by his ignorance of the requirements of the stage, for these are largely technical tricks, and Gorky has a fairly good command of them. He is not a dramatist because he has no definite ethical views and because, while opposing the so-called 'smugness,' the petty Philistine morality, he has not sufficiently comprehended the realm of higher morality. . . The more Gorky reveals himself in his quest of moral truth, the poorer his plays become.

"Here, for example, is 'Barbarians'—the last but one of his plays. It had its première in St. Petersburg the other day, and it was positively painful to watch this feeble, this altogether feeble play. It is not that one cannot see any evidence of talent on the part of the author. The play has some interesting and even novel characters; a striking artistic strain breaks out here and there. Yet one is bored—it is all so trivial and uninteresting. And note how extremely confusing the moral thesis of this play is. Who the barbarians are no one can tell. It would appear the visiting engineers are the barbarians. But it is possible the barbarians are the native inhabitants of the small backwater town. Nor can one tell what is meant by barbarism. It looks as though barbarism is the young, bright, upcoming, untapped force which is destined to turn everything upside down. On the other hand, it may be that barbarism is the destruction of the elemental traditional forms without replacing them by newer ones. . . . In 'Barbarians' the question of what is truth and where it is to be found absolutely defies definition. After all, not a single person in this crowd of characters commands our sympathy. And how is it possible to interest the audience in the fate of people for whom it can find no sympathy? Thus what we have here is precisely the result of the author's indifference to ethical problems."

One cannot help sympathizing with the critic in his inability to discover the moral message of the play. It is possible that Gorky himself could not answer his questions, despite the fact that he called the play "Barbarians" and made his characters use the word on a few occasions. But in works of art (Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* is an outstanding example) characters have a way of ignoring the author's message and asserting themselves as independent entities with a life entirely their own. In such cases, whether we sympathize with the characters or not, their very coming to life before our eyes is the miracle

that is creative art. In "Barbarians" the characters and all their surroundings do most vividly come to life out of the limbo of the author's imagination, and one character in particular, the hapless, comically romantic Nadezhda, assumes such monumental proportions that her tragedy invests the whole play with a broader and more intense significance than the mere conflict between native "barbarism" and sophisticated "civilization."

It is to the credit of Alexander Block, the great Russian poet of the pre-revolutionary era, that almost alone among his contemporaries he recognized the extraordinary tragic beauty of this character. He wrote:

"There is one person in the play who is so remarkable that she engraves herself on one's memory. This person is the wife of a revenue collector, Nadezhda Polikarpovna Monakhova, a tall woman of great beauty with enormous staring eyes. Genuine Russian strength and freedom emanate from her being. . . . She is strangely and beautifully whole. There is in her some great force that both attracts one and repels. She is strong with the power of some austere, animal fascination. I feel that the whole play was written for the sake of this character. It is possible to believe that it is she who is 'the human being,' the true heroine of the play, in the absence of a hero: 'You've killed a human being,' says her husband at the end of the play."

"Summer-folk," "The Children of the Sun," and "Barbarians" were performed on the stage, but none of them was a success. Production of "Enemies" was forbidden by the Tsarist censorship and the play did not see the footlights in Russia until 1933. Since then its exposition of the class war thesis has made it one of the classics of the Soviet repertoire.

Gorky returned to a moral-political theme in "The Last Ones" (1908). The play pictures a divided and disintegrating family faced with the moral issue of preventing or consenting to the execution of a young man accused, on questionable evidence, of a terroristic attempt on the head of the family, a debauched and callous police chief. The play's principal claim to distinction is its subtly woven, indirect dialogue. But the characterization, with a few minor exceptions, is much less impressive, and the didacticism, too heavily stressed, seems forced and unconvincing. Like "Enemies," it was forbidden to be produced in Russia and was dismissed by the book reviewers as another evidence of Gorky's declining talent.

After the revolutionary upheaval of 1905 Russian literature and drama were steadily turning away from characteristic aspects and problems of contemporary life. The new interest, shared by authors and public alike, was centered on broader generalizations stated in the form of allegory with cosmic overtones, or in terms of religious mysticism and esoteric symbolism. Gorky's deeply ingrained sense of

real life, though capable of taking on romantic coloration or the fervid emotionalism of a semi-religious worship of humanity, was largely out of tune with the prevailing mood of the Russian public. It is not surprising therefore that during that era of intellectual disquiet and groping attempts to discover new gods, his works, and especially his plays, received little attention. Yet he went on writing novels, stories, and plays, concentrating more and more on lower middle-class characters buried in the depths of provincial Russia and utterly removed from the problems, interests, and ways of thought of the sophisticated intelligentsia.

Only the first one of this series of plays, "Queer People" (published in 1910), harks back to Gorky's earlier themes. The characters of "Queer People" are all intellectuals, and inevitably there is a great deal of talking concerning the problems of life. But Gorky's own attitude toward his characters has noticeably mellowed. Although he calls them queer, he presents them in a warm, sympathetic light, and he clearly admires the selfless devotion of his principal heroine, Elena, as well as forgives the indiscretions of his hero, the writer Mastakov, whom he even uses as his mouthpiece to express his own affectionately cheerful view of Russia and her people.

"Queer People" was not a success on the stage and received only condescending notices from the majority of critics. One dissenting critic, however, who is unfortunately anonymous, should be quoted here for his more penetrating appreciation of the play and of Gorky's work as a whole:

"While a certain, modernistic section of our critics have long since buried M. Gorky," he wrote, "and have, not without some malicious satisfaction, raised a big wooden cross on his grave, the writer has been confidently moving forward, with each new work revealing ever new and still untapped resources of creative power. One gains this impression of artistic growth not only from his latest short stories but also from his plays, especially 'Queer People.' Here is the same familiar yet strangely transfigured author: new ideas, new colors, new, softened tones. . . ." " 'Queer People,' " continues the critic, "are the kind of people who do not so much live according to the demands and needs of their own inner nature, as play in their lives this or that *role* forced upon them by external circumstances."

"Vassa Zheleznova" was published in the same year as "Queer People." There is one interesting link between the two: "Vassa Zheleznova" develops an idea suggested by Mastakov, the central character of "Queer People." Speaking of an old woman, Medvedeva, who worries about her daughter, engaged to a consumptive egotist, Mastakov says to his wife, Elena: "Do you think, Lena, she's capable—out of love for her daughter—for young life—of committing a crime? . . . I *would* like her to be capable—for example—of giving poison to that Vassya. She's such a nice woman. Oh, it's a wonderful theme.

Only mothers can think of the future—because they give birth to it in their children."

Critics who wrote about "Vassa Zheleznova" before the revolution could see in it nothing but a story of a sordid intrigue carried on by a collection of moral freaks. Since the revolution the play has been interpreted as demonstrating the moral disintegration of a bourgeois family that is moved by a single interest—greed for money.

Both interpretations seem far wide of the mark. Vassa Zheleznova may not be "a nice woman" of the type of old Medvedeva in "Queer People," but she is neither a freak nor a money-mad merchant's wife. She is just "a mother who thinks of the future" and for this reason "is capable of committing a crime." Nor does it seem possible that anyone today can fail to be impressed by the amazing strength, the concentrated richness and the vividness of most of the other characters who figure in the play. Yet a well-known journalist, reviewing the play in 1911, was able to write as follows:

"What do I care about the Zheleznov family? What do I care about the lop-sided Pavel and his lop-sided tragedy? What do I care about the stupid Semyon and his dream of having a jewelry store on the main street? There are many families in literature in whose fate I am intensely interested. . . . But the Zheleznov family does not interest me, and at the performance I felt as if Gorky had forced me to eavesdrop at the door of some vile lower-middle-class house. . . . Upon my word, I don't care who will get the money after the death of father Zheleznov—whether it will be his disgusting wife or his lop-eared children. I yawned at the performance, and I am yawning now as I share my dull impressions with you. After all, you don't care two pins for the Zheleznov family either.

"I don't understand why it interested Gorky. What is there in this family? A résumé of the present? A clue to the past? A source of the future? Is it that Russia is reflected in it as it is reflected in the Larin, Prozorov, and Bezsemenov families? * It is nothing of the sort. It is not even *une histoire naturelle d'une famille,* in the manner of Zola. It is simply a dull story by Mr. N. about his acquaintances, the Z. family, who live in the town NN."

One has to be reminded of this literary blindness to realize what prejudice dogged the steps of the great writer.

Twenty-six years later, a few months before Gorky's death, a new version of "Vassa Zheleznova" was published. For reasons that are not difficult to conjecture, Gorky decided to inject a "social significance" theme into his old play. The "martyrdom" of motherhood was pushed into the background, and forward came the conflict between Vassa, the property owner, and a new character, her daughter-in-law, a revolutionary socialist. Compared with the first version of "Vassa Zhelez-

* Reference to the Larins in Pushkin's "Eugene Onegin," the Prozorovs in Chekhov's "Three Sisters," and the Bezsemenovs in Gorky's "The Smug Citizens." A. B.

nova," which is translated in this collection, the second version is essentially a new play, and an emasculated, much weaker play at that.

Gorky's exile abroad ended in 1914. Within a few months of his return, Russia was plunged into the first World War which shook the foundations of the old regime, brought on its overthrow in the February revolution of 1917, and culminated in the cataclysm of the Bolshevik revolution. Throughout those stormy years Gorky was active in the political field. He opposed the war while it lasted, and he also opposed the Bolsheviks for letting loose forces of destruction which, he believed at the time, they were incapable of controlling. But despite the immense amount of publicist writing and the great passion with which he defended his political views, as a playwright he remained serenely aloof from politics and the problems of the day. The series of plays which followed "Vassa Zheleznova" included "The Zykovs" (1914), "The Old Man" (1919), "The Counterfeit Coin" (1926), "Yegor Bulychov" (1931), and "Dostigayev and Others" (1933). Only in the last two plays, and only retrospectively at that, did Gorky touch upon matters of politics. On the other hand, in four of these plays, "Vassa Zheleznova," "The Zykovs," "The Old Man" and "Yegor Bulychov," he is seen to be primarily interested in the study of character, which in every case is so masterly in its results that it completely overshadows the moral problems around which the plots of these plays were built. The four plays are also bound together by a revealing and significant feature—Gorky's warm, almost loving, interest in the type of self-made and strong-willed men and women who rose from the lower middle class, mostly without benefit of education, to become rich merchants and manufacturers. His semi-admiring attitude toward these low-born capitalists, of whom Antipa Zykov and Yegor Bulychov are such magnificent specimens, stands in striking contrast to the sarcasm and bitterness with which he pictures the more westernized capitalists in "Enemies."

A place somewhat apart in Gorky's dramatic work is occupied by "The Counterfeit Coin." Its theme is the genuineness of human hearts which is put to a test by the power of counterfeit money to arouse human passions. The test, partly a psychological experiment, partly a means of exposing a crook, is conducted by a mysterious detective who has a personal interest in bringing it to a successful conclusion. The situation is complicated by the appearance of another mysterious and eccentric character, a man with a dual personality, compounded of sound common sense and lunacy, who holds out to the household he has entered the prospect of inheriting an unclaimed fortune. The play makes interesting and impressive reading, but the excess of mystery in its plot, coupled with the Pirandellian game of double identity, is rather confusing and gets in the way of direct appreciation of its characters and their individual problems.

Produced in 1918 and 1919, respectively, "The Zykovs" and "The

Old Man" * attracted little attention. The same fate befell "The Counterfeit Coin," produced in 1927. In fact, not until the production of "Yegor Bulychov" in 1931 did Gorky's plays (with the exception of his two earliest, "The Smug Citizens" and "The Lower Depths") begin to come into their own in Soviet Russia. Partly this was due to Gorky's long residence abroad, mainly in Italy (1922–30) for reasons of health; partly, perhaps largely, to the wild experimentation and the keen interest in topical political subjects which dominated the Soviet theater during the first ten years after the revolution. The trend toward realism which became marked in the early 30's revived interest in Gorky's work. "Dostigayev and Others," a rather plotless play describing the confusion, conflicting sympathies, and final break-up of a bourgeois family under the impact of the Bolshevik revolution, was produced in 1933, and like "Yegor Bulychov," of which it is vaguely a sequel, without equaling it either in power or color, has since established itself firmly in the Soviet repertoire. So has "Enemies," the reason, again, being its political message. Since Gorky's death, however, all his plays have come to be regarded as "classics" and as such are included in "the classic repertoire" which in Soviet Russia is an obligatory part of repertoire in all theaters. The great stature of Gorky as a dramatist still awaits full recognition in Russia where he is appreciated mostly as a critic of bourgeois society. Nevertheless, a number of his plays, including "The Lower Depths," "Yegor Bulychov," "Enemies," "Barbarians," and "The Zykovs" have already achieved a large measure of popularity with the Russian public, while several others are gaining steadily in public favor.

Besides the fifteen major plays that have been discussed here, Gorky wrote two one-act comedies which were produced in his lifetime, and two other plays which were published posthumously. There is little to be said of the comedies. One of them, "The Welcome" (1910), has amusing dialogue and characters, rather in the manner of Chekhov's "The Wedding," but very little action. The other, "The Hard-working Man Slovotyokov" (1920), a satire on Soviet officialdom, is a brief vaudeville sketch with more pantomime than dialogue.

Far more important are the two plays that appeared after Gorky's death. "Somov and Others," a play in four acts, must have been written, according to its editors, in 1930–31. It represents Gorky's only serious attempt to picture Soviet life and reflects the popular interest of the time in the so-called "wrecking activities" of the anti-Soviet elements. The story concerns a group of engineers and their families who are plotting to undermine the Soviet economy. The characters are motivated variously by a thirst for power, or hatred of the new regime, a desire to avenge themselves for past humiliations, or sheer greed. The all-knowing agents of the government appear at the exact

* The play appeared in an English translation by Marie Zakrevsky and Barrett H. Clark under the title "The Judge" (McBride, 1924).

psychological moment and arrest all the conspirators. Despite some felicities in the dialogue and one or two interesting characters, the play lacks balance, thanks to a sub-plot that leads nowhere, and is disappointing in its conventional and mechanical ending.

The other posthumously published play, "Yakov Bogomolov," dated 1926–27 by the editors (who also supply its title), is unfortunately incomplete, lacking its last act. It bears an elusive but unmistakable resemblance to "Queer People," its central theme, as in the earlier play, being the problem of love. Only this time it is a woman who inspires different kinds of love and who confounds all her admirers by a paradoxical return to her husband, a practical dreamer of grandiose schemes, whose idealism and selfless devotion to her convince her of his superiority over his rivals. The subtlety of characterization and dialogue in this play makes Gorky's failure to complete it a particularly regrettable loss to all lovers of the theater.

This sketch could be ended with a summary of Gorky's contribution to the Russian drama—his extraordinary sense of character, his scintillating dialogue, his deep sincerity, his moral earnestness, his questing spirit. But a broader appreciation of him as a writer, which the poet Alexander Block expressed with such power and insight, seems to be more fitting at this point:

"Gorky is bigger than he wants to be and than he always wanted to be, because his intuition is deeper than his intellect: inscrutably, by the fatal force of his talent, his blood, the nobility of his strivings, the infinity of his ideal, and the scope of his spiritual suffering, Gorky is *a Russian writer* . . . I will even go as far as to say that if there exists in reality what is called 'Russia,' or, better still, 'Russ,' beyond territory, state authority, state church, social hierarchy, and so forth—that is, if there exists that great, boundless, spacious, melancholy and felicitous something which we are accustomed to combine under the name of 'Russ,' then we have to recognize Gorky as the man who expresses all this to a very high degree."

ALEXANDER BAKSHY

THE LOWER DEPTHS

GORKY's original title for this play was "At the Bottom of Life." On the advice of a friend he soon shortened it to "At the Bottom," under which name the play was given its first production on the stage of the Moscow Art Theater. The play has been translated into English under a variety of titles, but "The Lower Depths" is the one best known in English-speaking countries.

The action of the play is laid in a Volga town at the turn of the century. The characters inhabiting Kostylyov's lodging house are representatives of the type known in Russia as *bosyák,* the name, literally meaning "a barefoot," having come to be applied to the whole class of people who did occasional odd jobs but lived mostly by their wits. They formed a motley, shiftless, and often criminal fringe of the population of most Russian towns and used to be particularly numerous in port towns.

Three of the characters in "The Lower Depths" (the Baron, Satin, and Peppel), are former jailbirds, and Luka (judging by Gorky's film scenario based on the play) is one of them, too, though obviously reformed. Three other characters, the locksmith Klestch and the two longshoremen, the Tartar and the Goiter, typify the conscientious, upright working man. Even the cynical capmaker, Bubnov, is honest in his own way. The contrast is significant. But it is Satin, Luka, and Peppel through whom the moral message of the play is mostly conveyed. The translator must own to inconsistency in retaining the Russian nickname "Kvashnya" (which means "a tub for leavening dough") for one of the characters, while translating the nickname of another character, "Goiter" (which is "Krivoy Zob" in Russian, meaning "a lopsided Adam's apple.") His main excuse, aside from reasons of convenience, is that as used in the play "Kvashnya" takes on almost the quality of a proper name.

A. B.

THE LOWER DEPTHS

CHARACTERS

The Baron, age 33
Kvashnya, peddles dumplings in the market, age close to 40
Bubnov, a capmaker, age 45
Andrey Dmitrich Klestch, a locksmith, age 40
Nastya, a girl of the streets, age 24
Anna, Klestch's wife, age 30
Satin, age close to 40
The Actor, age close to 40
Mikhail Ivanovich Kostylyov, keeper of the lodgings, age 54
Vassily (Vassya) Peppel, age 28
Natasha, sister of Vassilissa Kostylyova, age 20
Luka, a pilgrim, age 60
Alyoshka, a cobbler, age 20
Vassilissa Karpovna Kostylyova, wife of Mikhail Kostylyov, age 26
Abram Ivanych Medvedev, a policeman, Vassilissa's and Natasha's uncle, age 50
The Tartar, The Goiter } longshoremen

ACT I

A cavelike basement. A heavy vaulted ceiling, blackened with smoke, with patches where the plaster has fallen off. The light comes from the direction of the audience and from a square window high up the wall, right. The right corner is cut off by a thin partition behind which is PEPPEL'S *room. Near the door leading into it is* BUBNOV'S *plank bed.* In the left corner is a big Russian stove. In the stone wall, left, is a door to the kitchen, where* KVASHNYA, *the* BARON, *and* NASTYA *live. By the wall between the stove and the door stands a wide bed screened off by a dirty cotton-print curtain. Everywhere along the walls are plank beds. Near the left wall, downstage, stands a block of wood with a vise and a small anvil mounted upon it. Sitting before it, on a smaller block of wood, is* KLESTCH, *who is busy trying keys in old locks. On the floor lie two bunches of keys strung on wire rings, a battered tin samovar, a hammer, and some files. In the center of the basement stand a big table with a samovar, two benches, and a square stool—all unpainted and dirty. At the table* KVASHNYA *is serving tea, the* BARON *is munching black bread, and* NASTYA, *seated on the stool and leaning on the table, is reading a battered book.* ANNA, *lying on the bed behind the curtain, is heard coughing. On his plank bed the capmaker* BUBNOV, *holding a hat block between his legs, is fitting a ripped pair of pants over it, figuring out the best way to cut the cloth. Scattered about him are a torn hatbox containing cap visors, scraps of oilcloth, and cast-off clothing.* SATIN, *just awake, lies on a plank bed emitting loud guttural sounds. On top of the stove, unseen by the audience, the* ACTOR *is puttering around and coughing.*
It is morning in early spring.

BARON. Go on.

KVASHNYA. Oh, no, my friend, says I, keep away from me with that. I went through all that before, says I, and now you won't make me go to the altar even if you give me a hundred boiled crawfish.

BUBNOV (*to* SATIN). What are you snorting about?

SATIN *continues to grunt.*

KVASHNYA. That I, a free woman and my own mistress, says I—that I should enter myself in somebody else's passport and make myself a man's slave—never! I wouldn't marry him even if he were an American prince.

KLESTCH. Liar.

* A plank bed is a low wooden platform, which was used in Russian prisons and cheap lodging houses to provide sleeping accommodations, generally for several persons lying alongside one another. In the play Bubnov has a small plank bed to himself. Translator.

KVASHNYA. What's that?

KLESTCH. You're lying. You'll marry Abram all right.

BARON (*snatches* NASTYA'S *book and reads the title*). *Fatal Love.* (*He laughs.*)

NASTYA (*stretching out her hand*). Oh, give it back. Don't be childish. *The* BARON *gazes at her, waving the book in the air.*

KVASHNYA (*to* KLESTCH). You red-haired goat! I'm lying, am I? How dare you speak to me like that?

BARON (*hitting* NASTYA *on the head with the book*). You *are* a fool, Nastya—

NASTYA (*wresting the book from him*). Let me have it.

KLESTCH. Ha! A great lady. And you *will* marry Abram all the same —that's all you've been waiting for.

KVASHNYA. Oh, of course! I haven't got anything better to do. You've driven your wife till she's nearly dead—

KLESTCH. Shut up, you old sow! It's none of your business!

KVASHNYA. Oh, you don't like to hear the truth!

BARON. There it goes! What's doing, Nastya?

NASTYA (*without lifting her head*). Go away!

ANNA (*thrusting her head out from behind the curtain*). Another day starting! For heaven's sake, stop shouting and quarreling!

KLESTCH. Now she's whining again.

ANNA. Every day it's the same thing. Won't you let me die in peace?

BUBNOV. Noise never stopped anybody from dying.

KVASHNYA (*walking up to* ANNA). How could you live with such a brute?

ANNA. Leave me alone—

KVASHNYA. Well, you *are* a patient sufferer, poor soul. How does your chest feel? Any easier?

BARON. Kvashnya! It's time to go to market!

KVASHNYA. I'm coming. (*To* ANNA.) Would you like some hot meat dumplings?

ANNA. No, thank you. Why should I bother to eat?

KVASHNYA. Never you mind. Heat softens your innards. I'll put some in a cup and leave it for you—eat them when you feel like it. Come on, nobleman— (*To* KLESTCH.) You devil, you! (*Goes off to the kitchen.*)

ANNA (*coughing*). Oh, Lord—

BARON (*giving* NASTYA *a nudge on the back of the neck*). Drop it, silly!

NASTYA (*in a loud voice*). Go away—I'm not keeping you.

The BARON *follows* KVASHNYA *off, whistling.*

SATIN (*half rising from his plank bed*). Who beat me up last night?

BUBNOV. Does it make any difference?

SATIN. You're right, I suppose. But why did they beat me?

BUBNOV. Did you have a card game?

SATIN. I did.

BUBNOV. That's why they beat you up.

SATIN. The dirty swine!

ACTOR (*poking his head down from the stove*). They'll beat you to death one time—

SATIN. You're a blockhead.

ACTOR. Why?

SATIN. Because you can't kill a man two times.

ACTOR (*after a pause*). I don't understand—why not.

KLESTCH. You'd better come down off the stove and clean the place up— You've been loafing up there long enough.

ACTOR. That's none of your business.

KLESTCH. Wait till Vassilissa comes in—she'll show you whose business it is.

ACTOR. To hell with Vassilissa! Today it's the Baron's turn to clean. Baron!

BARON (*coming in from the kitchen*). I've no time for cleaning—I'm going to market with Kvashnya.

ACTOR. That has nothing to do with me—you can go to jail for all I care, but it's your turn to sweep the floor—I'm not going to do other people's work.

BARON. Oh, the devil with it! Nastya will sweep up. Hey, you, fatal love! Wake up! (*Snatches* NASTYA'S *book from her.*)

NASTYA (*rising*). What do you want? Give it back, you boor. Call yourself a nobleman.

BARON (*returning the book*). Nastya, sweep the floor for me, will you?

NASTYA (*going off to the kitchen*). No, thank you!

KVASHNYA *appears at the door.*

KVASHNYA (*to the* BARON). Come along with me. They can clean up without you. You've been asked, Actor, and you should do it. It won't break your back.

ACTOR. It's always me—I don't get it.

BARON (*coming in with a yoke over his shoulders, two baskets containing large cloth-covered pots hanging from the ends*). It's rather heavy today.

SATIN. Hardly worth your while to have been born a baron.

KVASHNYA (*to the* ACTOR). Now, mind you sweep the floor.

Preceded by the BARON, KVASHNYA *goes off.*

ACTOR (*coming down from the stove*). It's hard for me to breathe dust. (*Speaking with pride.*) My organism is poisoned with alcohol. (*He sits on a plank bed, sunk in thought.*)

SATIN. Organism—organon—

ANNA. Andrey Dmitrich—

KLESTCH. What is it now?

ANNA. Kvashyna has left me some dumplings in there—you eat them.

KLESTCH (*walking up to her*). Aren't you going to?

ANNA. No, I don't want any. Why should I eat? You work—you need it.

KLESTCH. Are you afraid? Don't be. You may pull through—

ANNA. Go eat the dumplings. I feel all in. Seems as though it's coming soon—

KLESTCH (*moving away*). Never mind—you may get up yet—that happens sometimes. (*Goes off into the kitchen.*)

ACTOR (*in a loud voice, as if waking up suddenly*). Yesterday, in the hospital, the doctor said to me: Your organism, he said, is completely poisoned with alcohol—

SATIN (*smiling*). Organon—

ACTOR (*insistently*). Not organon, but or-gan-ism—

SATIN. Sycamore—

ACTOR (*waving his hand at him*). You and your nonsense. I'm speaking seriously—I am. If my organism is poisoned, then it's bad for me to sweep the floor—to breathe dust—

SATIN. Macrobiotics— Ha!

BUBNOV. What are you mumbling about?

SATIN. Words— Here's another—transit-dental—

BUBNOV. What does that mean?

SATIN. Don't know—I can't remember.

BUBNOV. Why do you say them then?

SATIN. Because. I'm tired, my friend, of all human words, our words. I'm fed up with them. I've heard every one of them a thousand times, if I've heard them once.

ACTOR. There's a line in the play *Hamlet:* "Words—words—words!" A fine piece of work. I played the gravedigger.

KLESTCH (*coming in from the kitchen*). How soon are you going to play with the broom?

ACTOR. None of your business. (*Striking himself on the chest.*) The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered!

From off stage, somewhere in the distance, can be heard a muffled noise—followed by shouts and a policeman's whistle. KLESTCH *resumes his work, rasping with a file.*

SATIN. I love rare words I can't understand. When I was a boy I had a job in a telegraph office—used to read lots of books—

BUBNOV. So you were a telegrapher too?

SATIN. I was. There are some fine books—with lots of odd words. I was an educated man, you know.

BUBNOV. I've heard that a hundred times. So you were. So what? I was a fur-dresser at one time—had my own shop. My hands and arms got so yellow from dyeing furs—oh, so yellow—up to the elbow,

I tell you. I thought I'd never wash it off—even go to my grave with yellow arms. Well, look at them now—they're just dirty. Yes.

SATIN. And so?

BUBNOV. Nothing. That's all.

SATIN. Well, what are you driving at?

BUBNOV. Oh, just something to think over. It comes to this—no matter how you paint yourself up, it'll all rub off—yes, it'll all rub off.

SATIN. Oh—my bones are sore.

ACTOR (*sitting with his arms around his knees*). Education is rubbish. The main thing is talent. I knew an actor—he could scarcely read—but when he played his part the theater shook and rattled with the audience's raptures.

SATIN. Bubnov, give me five kopecks.

BUBNOV. All I've got is two kopecks.

ACTOR. Talent, I say, is what an actor needs. And talent is faith in oneself, in one's own powers.

SATIN. Give me five kopecks and I'll believe you're a talent, a hero, a crocodile, a bailiff— Klestch, give me five kopecks.

KLESTCH. Go to hell! There are too many of your kind around here.

SATIN. What are you cursing for? I know you haven't a kopeck.

ANNA. Andrey Dmitrich—I'm suffocating, I feel awful—

KLESTCH. What can I do?

BUBNOV. Open the door to the front hall.

KLESTCH. Thank you. You sit there on a plank bed, and I'm on the floor. Let me have your place, and you can open the door all you want. I have a cold as it is.

BUBNOV (*calmly*). There's no reason for me to open the door. It's your own wife asking.

KLESTCH (*sullenly*). People will ask for anything.

SATIN. Wow, my head's ringing! Why, I'd like to know, do people punch each other in the head?

BUBNOV. Not only heads—they do it to the rest of the body too. (*Rising.*) Got to go buy myself some thread. Funny, our landlord and his lady haven't shown up today—maybe they've dropped in their tracks. (*Goes off.*)

ANNA *coughs.* SATIN *lies motionless, his arms under his head.*

ACTOR (*looks around with sad eyes and walks up to* ANNA). Feeling bad?

ANNA. It's too stuffy in here.

ACTOR. If you like, I'll take you out into the hallway. Here, get up. (*He helps* ANNA *to rise, throws some old garment over her shoulders, and, holding her under the arm, leads her out to the hallway.*) Come, come—step out. I'm sick myself—poisoned with alcohol.

KOSTYLYOV *appears in the doorway.*

KOSTYLYOV. Going out for a walk? A fine couple—a ram and a lamb.

ACTOR. Make way—you see invalids are going out, don't you?

KOSTYLYOV. Pass on, if you please. (*Humming some hymn, he looks the place over suspiciously and inclines his head to the left as if trying to hear something in* PEPPEL'S *room.* KLESTCH *tinkles his keys and rasps his file with great firmness, meanwhile watching his landlord from under his brows.*) Grating away, are you?

KLESTCH. What?

KOSTYLYOV. You're grating, I say. (*After a pause.*) Oh—yes—what is it I wanted to ask you? (*Quickly, in a low voice.*) Has my wife been here?

KLESTCH. I haven't seen her.

KOSTYLYOV (*moving cautiously toward* PEPPEL'S *room*). What a lot of space you get from me for two rubles a month! A bed—a place to sit—h'm—it's worth all of five rubles, I swear! I think I'll raise you half a ruble.

KLESTCH. Raise me by the neck and strangle me while you're at it. You'll be dead soon, but all you think about is half rubles.

KOSTYLYOV. Why should I strangle you? What good will it do anybody? God be with you, my good man, live to your heart's content. But I *will* raise your rent a half ruble. That'll buy me more oil for my icon lamp—and my sacrifice will burn before the holy icon. That sacrifice will be reckoned for me as amends for my sins, and for yours too. You never think of your sins, do you? So there it is. Oh, Andrey! You're such a spiteful man. Your wife has withered away because of your spitefulness. Nobody likes or respects you—and your work grates on people's ears, disturbs everybody—

KLESTCH (*shouting*). Have you come to plague me?

SATIN *emits a loud roar.*

KOSTYLYOV (*startled*). My goodness! *Enter the* ACTOR.

ACTOR. I've seated the lady in the hallway, wrapped her up—

KOSTYLYOV. You have a kind heart, my friend. That's fine—that'll be credited to you.

ACTOR. When?

KOSTYLYOV. In the next world, my friend. Every deed, everything, is entered in a man's account there.

ACTOR. That's there. You ought to reward me for my kindness here.

KOSTYLYOV. Now, how could I do that?

ACTOR. Slash my debt in half.

KOSTYLYOV. Hee-hee! You will have your little joke, my dear fellow, you will keep play acting. Why, is kindness of heart comparable to money? Kindness stands above all benefits. And your debt to me is just what it is—a debt. Therefore you have to pay it back. To me who am an old man you must show kindness without looking for rewards—

ACTOR. Old man, you're a rogue.

The ACTOR *goes off to the kitchen.* KLESTCH *rises and exits to the hallway.*

KOSTYLYOV (*to* SATIN). He's run away, that grater—hee-hee! He doesn't like me.

SATIN. Who does like you, outside the devil?

KOSTYLYOV (*laughingly*). You *are* sharp. For myself, I like all of you —I understand you, my wretched, worthless, ruined brethren. (*Suddenly, quickly.*) Is Vassily in?

SATIN. Go look.

KOSTYLYOV (*walks up to* PEPPEL'S *door and knocks*). Vassya!

The ACTOR *appears at the kitchen door, munching.*

PEPPEL (*off stage*). Who's there?

KOSTYLYOV. It's me, Vassya.

PEPPEL (*from his room*). What do you want?

KOSTYLYOV (*moving back from the door*). Open the door—

SATIN (*without looking at* KOSTYLYOV). He'll open, and she's there.

The ACTOR *laughs.*

KOSTYLYOV (*alarmed, in a low voice*). What's that? Who's there? What do you mean?

SATIN. Are you speaking to me?

KOSTYLYOV. What was it you just said?

SATIN. I was talking to myself.

KOSTYLYOV. Look out, my friend. Know when to stop with your jokes—yes! (*Knocks loudly on* PEPPEL'S *door.*) Vassily!

PEPPEL *opens his door.*

PEPPEL. Well? What's the idea of disturbing me?

KOSTYLYOV (*peeking into the room*). You see, I have—

PEPPEL. Have you brought the money?

KOSTYLYOV. I have some business to talk over with you.

PEPPEL. Have you brought the money?

KOSTYLYOV. What money? Wait—

PEPPEL. I say the money, the seven rubles for the watch. Come on.

KOSTYLYOV. What watch? Oh, Vassya—

PEPPEL. Now look! Yesterday, before witnesses, I sold you a watch for ten rubles. I received three rubles, now hand over the other seven. Why are you blinking at me like that? You wander around here, disturb other people's sleep, but don't know your business.

KOSTYLYOV. Sh-sh! Don't lose your temper, Vassya. The watch—that's—

SATIN. Stolen goods—

KOSTYLYOV (*sternly*). I don't take stolen goods—how can you say—

PEPPEL (*seizing* KOSTYLYOV *by the shoulder*). Why did you wake me up? What do you want?

KOSTYLYOV. I don't want anything—I'll go—if you feel that way.

PEPPEL. Go bring the money.

KOSTYLYOV. Such rude people! I must say! (*Goes off.*)

ACTOR. A regular comedy!

SATIN. Wonderful! I love it!

PEPPEL. What brought him here?

SATIN. Don't you understand? He's looking for his wife. Why don't you finish him off, Vassily?

PEPPEL. It's not worth spoiling my life over trash like him.

SATIN. You ought to make a neat job of it. Then you can marry Vassilissa—become our landlord—

PEPPEL. I can hardly wait! With your kind hearts you'll drink up all my property in a barroom, and me too. (*He sits down on a plank bed.*) The old pest—woke me up! And I had such a fine dream. I was fishing some place and caught a huge perch. It was such a size, it could only happen in a dream. Well, I pull it along on the hook and all the time I'm afraid the line will snap. I keep the bag ready hoping to get the perch in any minute—

SATIN. It wasn't a perch—it was Vassilissa.

ACTOR. He caught Vassilissa a long time ago.

PEPPEL. Go to hell, all of you—you *and* Vassilissa!

KLESTCH *enters from the front hall.*

KLESTCH. Damn cold out!

ACTOR. Why didn't you bring Anna in? She'll freeze to death.

KLESTCH. Natasha took her into her kitchen.

ACTOR. The old man will throw her out.

KLESTCH (*sitting down to resume his work*). Well, then Natasha will bring her here.

SATIN. Let me have five kopecks, Vassily.

ACTOR (*to* SATIN). Five kopecks! Look, Vassya! Give us a quarter of a ruble.

PEPPEL. I'd better give it to you quick—before you ask for a ruble. Here!

SATIN. Gibraltar! There are no better people in the world than thieves.

KLESTCH. Money comes easy to them—they don't have to work.

SATIN. Money comes easy to many people, but it doesn't come so easy to let it go. As for work, just you make it pleasant for me and I'll probably work— Yes, I probably will. When work is a pleasure, life is a joy! When work is a duty, life is slavery. (*To* ACTOR.) Let's go, Sardanapalus.

ACTOR. Let's go, Nebuchadnezzar. I'm going to get boiled—like forty thousand sots.

SATIN *and the* ACTOR *go off.*

PEPPEL (*yawning*). Well, how's your wife?

KLESTCH (*after a pause*). Looks like it'll be pretty soon now.

PEPPEL. You know, looking at you—I can't see any sense to your grating.

KLESTCH. What else can I do?

PEPPEL. Do nothing.

KLESTCH. How am I supposed to eat?

PEPPEL. Other people manage to live.

KLESTCH. You mean the ones here? They're not people. Scum, hoodlums—that's all they are. I'm a worker—I feel ashamed to set eyes on them—I've been working since I was a kid. You think I won't get out of here? I'll wriggle out of this hole even if it tears my skin off. Just wait till my wife dies— I've lived six months here, but it feels more like six years—

PEPPEL. Nobody here is any worse than you are—you're wrong about that.

KLESTCH. They're not! These men with no honor or conscience—

PEPPEL (*indifferently*). What good are honor and conscience? You can't put them on your feet instead of boots. Honor and conscience are only important to those who have power—force—

Enter BUBNOV.

BUBNOV. Whew, I'm shivering!

PEPPEL. Bubnov, have you got a conscience?

BUBNOV. What? Conscience?

PEPPEL. That's what I said.

BUBNOV. What do I want a conscience for? I'm no moneybags.

PEPPEL. That's just what I say. Only rich people need honor and conscience. And Klestch here criticizes us, says we have no conscience.

BUBNOV. Why, does he want to borrow some?

PEPPEL. He has plenty of his own.

BUBNOV (*to* KLESTCH). Then you're selling it? Well, you'll have a tough time finding customers here. There's one thing I would buy—marked cards—but even those would have to be on credit.

PEPPEL (*lecturing him*). You're a fool, Andrey. You ought to listen to Satin—or the Baron about conscience.

KLESTCH. I have nothing to talk to them about.

PEPPEL. They've got more brains than you have—even if they are drunks.

BUBNOV. Be both drunk and smart—you've got a good start.

PEPPEL. Satin says—everybody wants his neighbor to have a conscience, but it turns out nobody can afford one. And it's the truth.

Enter NATASHA. *She is followed by* LUKA *who has a stick in his hand, a peasant knapsack on his back, and a kettle and teapot hanging from his waist.*

LUKA. Good health to you, honest people.

PEPPEL (*smoothing down his mustache*). Ah, Natasha!

BUBNOV (*to* LUKA). We were honest, you bet—so far back we forget.

NATASHA. This is a new lodger.

LUKA. It's all the same to me. I have just as much respect for crooks. To my way of thinking, every flea is a good flea—they're all dark and all good jumpers. Where do I accommodate myself here, my dear?

NATASHA (*pointing to the kitchen door*). Step in there, grandpa.

LUKA. Thank you, girlie. Anywhere you say. To an old man any place that's warm is homeland. (LUKA *goes off.*)

PEPPEL. What an interesting old man you've brought, Natasha.

NATASHA. More interesting than you are. Your wife's in our kitchen. Andrey. Come get her in a little while.

KLESTCH. All right, I will.

NATASHA. You ought to treat her more kindly, Andrey. It won't be long now—

KLESTCH. I know.

NATASHA. You know. It's not enough to know—you have to understand. It's a frightening thing to die.

PEPPEL. I'm not afraid of death.

NATASHA. You *are* a brave man.

BUBNOV (*whistles*). This thread is rotten.

PEPPEL. Really, I'm not afraid. I'll accept my death any time—right now. Take a knife and stab me to the heart, I'll die without a sigh of regret. Even with joy, because it comes from a pure hand.

NATASHA (*as she turns to go off*). Well—you'd better pull the wool over somebody else's eyes.

BUBNOV (*drawling*). The thread is rotten, it's a fact.

NATASHA (*at the door*). Don't forget about your wife, Andrey.

KLESTCH. All right. NATASHA *goes off.*

PEPPEL. A fine girl.

BUBNOV. Not bad.

PEPPEL. Why is she so uppity with me—turning me down? She'll get ruined here anyway.

BUBNOV. She will—through you.

PEPPEL. Why through me? I feel sorry for her.

BUBNOV. Like a wolf for a sheep.

PEPPEL. That's a lie. I feel very sorry for her. She has a hard time of it here—I see it.

KLESTCH. Wait till Vassilissa catches you talking to her.

BUBNOV. Vassilissa? Y-yes, that one doesn't make anybody a present of what's hers.

PEPPEL (*lying down on a plank bed*). Go to hell, both of you—Prophets, too!

KLESTCH. You'll see—just wait.

LUKA (*in the kitchen, singing*). In the darkness of the night you can't see the road aright—

KLESTCH. Listen to that howling. New lodger! Hmph! (*Goes off into the hall.*)

PEPPEL. God, I'm bored. What is it makes me feel bored? You go on living, everything is fine. Suddenly, as if you'd caught a chill—you feel bored.

BUBNOV. Bored? H'm!

PEPPEL. Up to here.

LUKA (*singing in the kitchen*). No, sir, you can't see your road aright—

PEPPEL. Hey, there, old man!

LUKA (*peeping out of the kitchen*). You mean me?

PEPPEL. Yes, you. Stop singing.

LUKA (*coming in*). Don't you like it?

PEPPEL. I do when the singing's good.

LUKA. Then mine is bad?

PEPPEL. It seems so.

LUKA. Imagine! And I thought I sang well. It's always like that. A man thinks to himself: I'm doing a good job. Then bang—everybody is displeased.

PEPPEL (*laughing*). That's true!

BUBNOV. You say you're bored, and there you're laughing.

PEPPEL. What's that to you? The croaking raven.

LUKA. Who's bored around here?

PEPPEL. I am. *Enter the* BARON.

LUKA. Imagine that! In the kitchen there a girl is sitting. She's reading a book and crying—yes, crying! Tears roll down from her eyes. I say to her, What's the matter, my dear? And she answers, I feel so sorry for him. For who? I ask her. And she says—the man here, in this book. Some people find strange things to bother them, don't they? Must be from boredom too.

BARON. That one is a fool.

PEPPEL. Baron, have you had tea?

BARON. Yes. Go on.

PEPPEL. Would you like me to treat you to half a bottle?

BARON. Of course I would. Go on.

PEPPEL. Get down on all fours and bark like a dog.

BARON. Idiot! Who are you—a wealthy merchant? Or are you drunk?

PEPPEL. Oh, come on—do some barking. It'll amuse me. You're one of the high and mighty. Time was when you looked upon the common folk like me as if we weren't human beings and all that sort of thing—

BARON. Go on.

PEPPEL. Well, today I'll make you bark like a dog, and you will bark. You know you will.

BARON. So I will. Fathead! What sort of pleasure can you derive from that, when I know myself I've grown perhaps even worse than you. You should have tried to make me walk on all fours when you weren't my equal.

BUBNOV. That's true.

LUKA. Very good, if you ask me.

BUBNOV. What's gone is gone, and what's left isn't worth talking about. We have no high and mighty gentlemen here—everything has washed off—only the naked man remains.

LUKA. Therefore all are equal. Were you a baron, dear fellow?

BARON. What is this? Who are you, you old goblin?

LUKA. I've met a count, and a prince too—but this is the first time I've ever seen a baron, and a damaged one at that.

PEPPEL (*laughs*). You know, Baron, you've made me feel a bit ashamed of myself.

BARON. It's time you showed more intelligence, Vassily.

LUKA. Oh-ho-ho! Just to look at you, my good friends, one can see what kind of a life—

BUBNOV. Every morning's so foul we wake up with a howl.

BARON. We knew better times too. I used to wake up in the morning and drink coffee in bed—yes, coffee with cream!

LUKA. Yet all of you are just human beings. Yes, put on as much as you like, wriggle as much as you can, but just as you were born a man, so you'll die a man. And as I look on I see everybody getting cleverer and more interesting. They all live worse, it's true, but they all want something better—a stubborn lot.

BARON. Who are you, old man? Where do you come from?

LUKA. Who, me?

BARON. Are you a pilgrim?

LUKA. All of us are pilgrims on this earth. I've even heard people say that the earth itself is a pilgrim in the heavens.

BARON (*sternly*). That may be, but how about a passport? Have you got one?

LUKA. And who are you, a detective?

PEPPEL (*delightedly*). That's the ticket, old man. Got it in the neck, eh, Baron?

BUBNOV. Y-yes, our gentleman got it good and proper.

BARON (*embarrassed*). What's the matter? I'm only joking, old man. Why, my friend, I have no papers myself.

BUBNOV. Liar.

BARON. That is, I have papers, but they're no good for anything.

LUKA. All papers are like that—no good for anything.

PEPPEL. Baron, let's go have a drink.

BARON. I'm ready. Good-by, old man. You are a rogue, though.

LUKA. All's possible, my friend.

PEPPEL (*at the hallway door*). Well, come on.

PEPPEL *goes off, the* BARON *hurrying after him.*

LUKA. The fellow actually was a baron?

BUBNOV. God knows! But he's an aristocrat all right. Even now it breaks out all of a sudden. Seems it never got completely rubbed off.

LUKA. Maybe aristocracy is just like smallpox. A man gets well, but the pock marks remain.

BUBNOV. He's not bad, though. Only sometimes he's got to kick up a fuss—like about your passport today.

Enter ALYOSHKA. *He is tipsy, carries an accordion, and is whistling as he comes in.*

ALYOSHKA. Hey, inhabitants!

BUBNOV. What are you yelling for?

ALYOSHKA. Excuse me. Pardon me. I'm a polite man—

BUBNOV. Off on a binge again?

ALYOSHKA. All I can hold! Just a minute ago subinspector Medyakin threw me out of the police station. Don't let me even get the smell of you in the streets, says he, ever! And I'm a man of character. My boss spits at me like a cat. And what's a boss? Pooh! He's a drunkard, my boss is. And I'm a man—who wants nothing. Nothing—and that's that! You can have me for a ruble twenty! But I want nothing! Give me a million—I don't want it. And to let my fellow worker who's a drunkard order me around—I won't have it. I won't, no, I won't!

NASTYA *appears in the kitchen doorway and shakes her head as she watches* ALYOSHKA.

LUKA (*good-humoredly*). You *have* got yourself in a tangle, young man—

BUBNOV. Just human foolishness.

ALYOSHKA (*stretching himself out on the floor*). There, you can eat me up for all I care. But I want nothing. I'm a reckless man. Explain to me—why am I worse than other people, and who are they? Medyakin says: Keep off the street or I'll knock your block off. But I will go out. I'll lie in the middle of the street—let them run over me! I want nothing!

NASTYA. Poor thing! So young, and already—makes a fool of himself.

ALYOSHKA (*noticing* NASTYA, *raises himself to his knees*). Mamsel! Parlez français? Prix-fixe? I'm painting the town red—

NASTYA (*in a loud whisper*). Vassilissa!

Flinging open the hallway door, VASSILISSA *enters.*

VASSILISSA (*to* ALYOSHKA). You here again?

ALYOSHKA. Good morning—please step right in—

VASSILISSA. I told you, dog, not to show your face around here, didn't I? And you're here again?

ALYOSHKA. Vassilissa Karpovna— I'll play you a funeral march, shall I?

VASSILISSA (*pushing him by the shoulder*). Get out!

ALYOSHKA (*moving toward the door*). Now wait—you can't do that. A funeral march—I've just learned it—fresh music. No, wait—you can't do that.

VASSILISSA. I'll show you what I can't do. I'll set the whole street on you, you dirty prattler. You're too young to go around yapping about me.

ALYOSHKA. All right, I'm going. (*Runs out.*)

VASSILISSA. Don't let him set foot in here ever again. You hear me?

BUBNOV. I'm not your watchman.

VASSILISSA. I don't care who you are. You're living here on charity, remember that. How much do you owe me?

BUBNOV (*calmly*). I haven't counted it.

VASSILISSA. Look out, or I will! ALYOSHKA *opens the door.*

ALYOSHKA (*shouting*). Vassilissa Karpovna! I'm not afraid of you—not that much! *He sneaks into the kitchen.* LUKA *laughs.*

VASSILISSA. Who are you?

LUKA. A wayfarer—a pilgrim.

VASSILISSA. For a night or to stay?

LUKA. That depends.

VASSILISSA. Your passport.

LUKA. You shall have it.

VASSILISSA. Let me see.

LUKA. I'll bring it to you—drag it up to your very own door.

VASSILISSA. Wayfarer indeed! You should have called yourself a tramp—that would have been nearer the truth.

LUKA (*with a sigh*). Not much kindliness in you, woman.

VASSILISSA *moves toward* PEPPEL'S *room.* ALYOSHKA *peeps out of the kitchen.*

ALYOSHKA (*in a whisper*). Has she gone?

VASSILISSA (*turning toward him*). You still here?

ALYOSHKA *disappears, whistling.* NASTYA *and* LUKA *laugh.*

BUBNOV (*to* VASSILISSA). He's out.

VASSILISSA. Who is?

BUBNOV. Vassily.

VASSILISSA. Have I asked you about him?

BUBNOV. I see you're looking in everywhere.

VASSILISSA. I'm looking to see that things are in order—understand? And why hasn't the floor been swept at this hour? How many times have I ordered you to keep the place clean?

BUBNOV. It's the Actor's turn—

VASSILISSA. I don't care whose it is. But if the sanitation inspectors come and I'm fined, I'll throw the whole damn lot of you out!

BUBNOV (*calmly*). What will you live on then?

VASSILISSA. Don't let me see a speck of dust here! (*Walks toward the kitchen and stops before* NASTYA.) What are you sticking around for? And your face all swollen up too. Don't stand there like a stump. Sweep the floor. Have you seen—Natasha? Has she been here?

NASTYA. I don't know— I haven't seen her.

VASSILISSA. Bubnov! Has my sister been here?

BUBNOV (*pointing at* LUKA). She brought him in.

VASSILISSA. And that one—was he in?

BUBNOV. Vassily? Yes, he was. She talked to Klestch here, your Natasha.

VASSILISSA. I'm not asking you who she talked to. Dirt—filth everywhere! Oh, pigs! See that this place is clean, hear me? (*She goes off quickly.*)

BUBNOV. God, what a brute that woman is!

LUKA. A peppery madam.

NASTYA. Anybody would be a brute leading such a life. Tie any live human being to a husband like hers—

BUBNOV. Well, she's not tied too fast—

LUKA. Does she always act up like this?

BUBNOV. Always. You see, she came to see her lover, and he's out.

LUKA. So she felt hurt— I see. Oh-ho! So many different people order others around on this earth—and try to throw all sorts of scares into each other, but still there's no order in life—nor cleanliness.

BUBNOV. Everybody wants order, but their brains are in disorder. Anyway—somebody's got to sweep the floor. Nastya, you take care of it.

NASTYA. Oh, of course! I'm not your maid here. *(After a pause.)* I'm going to get drunk today—gloriously drunk!

BUBNOV. That's an idea.

LUKA. Why do you want to get drunk, girlie? Just a while ago you were crying—now you say you want to get drunk.

NASTYA (*challengingly*). And when I'm drunk I'll cry again—that's all.

BUBNOV. All—that isn't much.

LUKA. But what's the reason, tell me? Even a pimple doesn't just spring up, without a reason. (NASTYA *makes no answer, only shakes her head.*) I see— Oh-ho-ho! You human beings! What's going to happen to you? Well, let me sweep up here then. Where's your broom?

BUBNOV. Behind the door, in the hallway. (LUKA *goes into the hallway.*) Nastya!

NASTYA. Yes?

BUBNOV. Why did Vassilissa jump on Alyoshka?

NASTYA. He's been telling everybody Vassily's sick of her and wants to drop her for Natasha. I'm going to get out of here and move to other lodgings.

BUBNOV. What for? And where?

NASTYA. I'm fed up— I'm not needed here.

BUBNOV (*calmly*). You're not needed anywhere. For that matter all humans on this earth are not needed.

NASTYA *shakes her head, rises, and goes out into the hallway. Enter* MEDVEDEV, *a policeman, followed by* LUKA *carrying a broom.*

MEDVEDEV. I don't think I know you.

LUKA. Do you know everybody else?

MEDVEDEV. On my beat I have to know everybody. But I don't know you.

LUKA. That's because the earth couldn't squeeze all of itself into your beat, uncle—a bit of it has remained outside. (*He goes off to the kitchen.*)

MEDVEDEV (*walking up to* BUBNOV). He's right, mine is a small beat —though it's worse than any big one. Just a while ago, before going off duty, I took the cobbler Alyoshka to the station. He stretched himself out in the middle of the street, began playing his accordion, and yelled—I don't want anything—I don't want anything. There were horses in the street and all sorts of traffic—he could have been crushed to death and all that. A wild fellow. Well, I took him in—he's too fond of disorder.

BUBNOV. Coming for a game of checkers tonight?

MEDVEDEV. I am. Y-yes. And how is—Vassily?

BUBNOV. He's all right. The same as always.

MEDVEDEV. Then he's still carrying on?

BUBNOV. Why shouldn't he? He can carry on—

MEDVEDEV (*doubtfully*). Can he? (LUKA, *carrying a bucket, crosses the room to the hallway.*) Y-yes— There's been some talk about Vassily around here—have you heard it?

BUBNOV. I hear all sorts of talk—

MEDVEDEV. About him and Vassilissa— Have you noticed anything?

BUBNOV. Noticed what?

MEDVEDEV. Just in general— Or maybe you know and are lying to me? Everybody knows it— (*Severely.*) One musn't lie, my friend.

BUBNOV. Why should I lie?

MEDVEDEV. Glad you see it my way. Oh, the swine! They say Peppel and Vassilissa—are like that— What's that got to do with me? I'm not her father—only her uncle. Why should they make fun of me?

Enter KVASHNYA.

God knows what people are coming to—they laugh at everything. Ah! It's you!

KVASHNYA. It's me, my precious uniform! Bubnov, he pestered me again at the market to marry him—

BUBNOV. Why not? Go to it! He's got money, and still makes a presentable swain.

MEDVEDEV. Me? Ho! Ho!

KVASHNYA. Ah, so? Don't touch my sore spot, policeman. I went through it once before, dear man. When a woman gets married it's like jumping into a hole in the ice in the middle of winter: you do it once, and you remember it the rest of your days.

MEDVEDEV. Wait a minute. Husbands aren't all alike.

KVASHNYA. But I'm always the same. When my darling husband— God blast his soul—gave up the ghost, I was so happy I stayed in alone the whole day— I sat and couldn't believe my good luck.

MEDVEDEV. If your husband beat you—for no good reason, you should have complained to the police.

KVASHNYA. I kept complaining to God for eight years—he never helped.

MEDVEDEV. Today wife-beating is forbidden. Today there's law and

order in everything. You can't beat anybody for nothing. If you do beat anyone, it's got to be for the sake of order.

Enter LUKA, *leading* ANNA.

LUKA. Here, we've made it. Don't you know you mustn't walk around alone with your weak constitution? Where's your place?

ANNA (*pointing to her bed*). Thank you, grandpa!

KVASHNYA. There's a married one. Look at her.

LUKA. The little woman has a very weak constitution. She was walking along the hallway, clinging to the walls, and moaning. Why do you let her walk by herself?

KVASHNYA. It was careless of us, sir, please forgive us. And her chambermaid must have gone out for a stroll.

LUKA. You're making a joke of it—but how can anybody cast off a human being? Whatever condition he's in, a human being is always worth something.

MEDVEDEV. You have to keep your eye on a person. What if she dies? There'll be a lot of complications. Yes, you have to keep an eye open.

LUKA. Very true, master sergeant.

MEDVEDEV. Y-yes—though I'm not quite a master sergeant yet—

LUKA. Ain't you? You look like a hero.

There is noise and a stamping of feet in the hallway. Muffled sounds of shouting are heard.

MEDVEDEV. Must be a brawl?

BUBNOV. Sounds like it.

KVASHNYA. I'm going to take a look.

MEDVEDEV. I'll have to be going too. Duty is duty! I wish when people started a fight other people would leave them alone. They'd stop fighting themselves—when they got tired. They should be allowed to knock each other around without interference, for all they're worth. They wouldn't be so keen to get into scrapes again—they'd remember their bruises—

BUBNOV (*getting up from his plank bed*). You ought to tell that to the Chief of Police—

The door bursts wide open, revealing KOSTYLYOV *on the threshold.*

KOSTYLYOV (*shouting*). Abram! Come quick! Vassilissa's—killing—Natasha! Quick!

KVASHNYA, MEDVEDEV, *and* BUBNOV *rush out into the hallway.* LUKA *gazes after them, shaking his head.*

ANNA. Oh, God! Poor little Natasha!

LUKA. Who's fighting out there?

ANNA. Our landladies—sisters—

LUKA (*walking up to* ANNA). What are they dividing up?

ANNA. They've nothing better to do—they're well fed and strong—

LUKA. What's your name?

ANNA. Anna. You know, as I look at you, you remind me of my father—just as kind—and soft.

LUKA. I've been through the wringer—that's why I'm soft. (*He laughs with a cracked senile laugh.*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same basement. On the plank bed near the stove SATIN, *the* BARON, *the* GOITER, *and the* TARTAR *are playing cards.* KLESTCH *and the* ACTOR *are watching the game. On his plank bed* BUBNOV *is playing checkers with* MEDVEDEV. LUKA *is sitting on a square stool by* ANNA'S *bed.*

It is evening. The place is lighted by two lamps: one hanging from the wall near the cardplayers, the other on BUBNOV'S *plank bed.*

TARTAR. I play one more game—then I play no more—

BUBNOV. Goiter, sing! (*Striking up.*) The sun comes up, the sun goes down again—

GOITER (*continuing*). But in my cell it's never light—

TARTAR (*to* SATIN). Mix cards—mix 'em good! I know good what you are.

BUBNOV AND GOITER (*singing together*). The guards are watching my barred window—e-eh! Watching closely day and night—

ANNA. Beatings—harsh words, that's all I've ever known in my life. Nothing but that—

LUKA. Forget it, my good woman. Don't upset yourself.

MEDVEDEV. Where are you moving your man? Are you blind?

BUBNOV. A-ah! I see—I see—

TARTAR (*threatening* SATIN *with his fist*). Why you try hide a card? I see it— Oh!

GOITER. Don't bother, Assan! They'll clean up on us anyway! Bubnov, sing.

ANNA. I don't remember a time I didn't feel hungry. I counted every piece of bread. All my life I've trembled and worried that I might eat more than my share. All my life I've been wearing rags—all my miserable life. What have I done to deserve this?

LUKA. Poor child! You are worn out. Never mind.

ACTOR (*to the* GOITER). Play the jack—the jack, you fool!

BARON. And we have a king.

KLESTCH. They'll always beat your card.

SATIN. Such is our habit.

MEDVEDEV. King!

BUBNOV. Mine too. Well—

ANNA. I'm dying now—

KLESTCH. Oh, oh! Stop playing, Assan, take a tip from me and get out of the game.

ACTOR. He can't do without your advice, can he?

BARON. Watch out, Andrey, or I'll send you packing to hell!

TARTAR. Deal again. The jug went for water—broke himself—and me too! *Shaking his head,* KLESTCH *moves over to* BUBNOV.

ANNA. I keep thinking: O God! Am I to be punished with suffering in the next world too? Even there, O God?

LUKA. You won't be. Don't worry. Nothing will happen to you. You'll have a good rest there. Just bear up a little more. Everybody bears his life, my dear, each in his own way. (*He rises and walks quickly to the kitchen.*)

BUBNOV (*singing*). You guards can watch my window closely—

GOITER (*singing*). I will not try my leave to take—

BUBNOV AND GOITER (*together*). I'd surely like to get my freedom—e-eh! But no—my chains I cannot break.

TARTAR (*shouting*). Ah! You push a card up your sleeve.

BARON (*embarrassed*). Well—where do you want me to push it—up your nose?

ACTOR. You're wrong, Assan—nobody would do that—never.

TARTAR. I saw it. Crook. I no play.

SATIN (*gathering the cards*). Leave off, Assan. You knew we were crooks. If so, why did you play with us?

BARON. You've lost two quarter rubles, but make three rubles' worth of noise. Ah!

TARTAR (*heatedly*). You must play honest.

SATIN. What for?

TARTAR. What you mean, what for?

SATIN. Just that—what for?

TARTAR. You not know?

SATIN. I don't. Do you?

The TARTAR *spits in bitter disgust. The others laugh at him.*

GOITER (*good-humoredly*). You're a funny man, Assan. Can't you understand? If they're going to start living honestly, they'll die of hunger in three days.

TARTAR. That no my business. People must live honest.

GOITER. There he goes—like a parrot. We'll do better to go have tea. Bubnov! (*Singing.*) O chains, you heavy chains that bind me—

BUBNOV. You are my iron guards in truth—

GOITER. Come on, Assan. (*Goes off, singing.*) I know I cannot break you ever—e-eh!

The TARTAR *shakes his fist at the* BARON *and follows his friend.*

SATIN (*to the* BARON). Your Excellency, you made a magnificent fool of yourself once again. You're an educated man, and still you can't do a proper job of cheating at cards—

BARON (*spreading his hands*). Devil knows how I muffed it.

ACTOR. You lack talent—faith in yourself—and without that a man can do nothing—ever.

MEDVEDEV. I have one king, and you have two. H'mm!

BUBNOV. Even one is all right if he's clever and bright. Your move.

KLESTCH. Your game is lost, Abram Ivanych.

MEDVEDEV. Mind your own business, understand? Hold your tongue.

SATIN. Winnings—fifty-three kopecks.

ACTOR. Three kopecks go to me. Though what do I want three kopecks for? *Enter* LUKA *from the kitchen.*

LUKA. Well, you've cleaned up the Tartar. Now you'll go drink some vodka, I take it?

BARON. Come with us.

SATIN. I'd like to see what sort of a man you are when drunk.

LUKA. No better than when I'm sober.

ACTOR. Come along, grandpa—I'll recite some verses to you.

LUKA. What are those?

ACTOR. You know—poems.

LUKA. Oh, poems! And what do I want poems for?

ACTOR. They make one laugh—or sometimes sad.

SATIN. Are you coming, reciter? (SATIN *and the* BARON *go off.*)

ACTOR. In a minute. I'll catch up with you. Here, grandpa, is something from a poem—I forget how it begins— H'm, I forget— (*He rubs his forehead.*)

BUBNOV. There! It's good-by to your king. Your move.

MEDVEDEV. Damn it—I made the wrong move.

ACTOR. In the old days, old man, when my organism wasn't yet poisoned with alcohol, I had a good memory. Now it's all over with me—it's all over. I always read that poem with great success—it brought the house down. You don't know what applause is— It's like vodka, my friend. I would come on the stage, stand like this— (*Assumes a pose.*) Yes, stand like this and— (*A long pause.*) I can't remember a thing—not a single word! And it's the poem I loved best of all— That's bad, old man, isn't it?

LUKA. It can't be good if you've forgotten something you loved best. All our soul is in what we love.

ACTOR. I've drunk up my soul, old man. I'm lost. And why am I lost? Because I had no faith in myself. I'm finished.

LUKA. Why finished? You get yourself treated. They treat for drunkenness today, so I hear. Free of charge, too. There's a special hospital for drunkards—so they can be treated for nothing. They've decided, you see, that a drunkard is a human being like everybody else, and they're even glad when he wants to be treated. There's a chance for you—go there right away.

ACTOR (*reflectively*). Go where? Where is it?

LUKA. It's—in a town—what's its name? It's called— Never mind, I'll give you the name! Only you know what—you prepare yourself in the meantime. Keep away from vodka. Pull yourself together and bear up! Then later you'll be cured—and you'll start your life all over again. Yes, all over again—wouldn't it be fine, my friend? Well, make up your mind—and be quick about it!

ACTOR (*smiling*). All over again—from the start— That'll be fine—Yes, yes. Again. (*He laughs.*) Of course. I can do that. Surely I can, don't you think?

LUKA. Why, certainly. A man can do anything, if he only wants to.

ACTOR (*as if suddenly awakened*). You're a queer fellow. So long! (*Whistles.*) So long, old man. (*Goes off.*)

ANNA. Grandpa!

LUKA. What is it, my dear?

ANNA. Talk to me.

LUKA (*coming up to her*). All right, let's talk.

KLESTCH *looks about, walks up to his wife, gazes at her, and gesticulates as if wishing to say something.*

What is it, my friend?

KLESTCH (*in a low voice*). Nothing. (*He walks slowly toward the hallway, stops for a few seconds at the threshold, and goes off.*)

LUKA (*after following* KLESTCH *with his eyes*). Your husband finds it hard to bear.

ANNA. I have other things than him to think of now.

LUKA. Did he beat you?

ANNA. Didn't he though! It's through him, I think, that I took sick—

BUBNOV. My wife—had a lover. The rascal was awfully good at checkers—

MEDVEDEV. H'm—

ANNA. Talk to me, grandpa dear. I feel sick—

LUKA. It's all right. It's before death, dear. It's all right. You keep hoping. You'll die, you see, and then you'll have peace. You'll have nothing to fear—nothing at all. There'll be peace and quiet—and you'll have nothing to do but lie. Death quiets everything. It's kind to us humans. When you die you'll have rest, folks say. It's true, my dear. For where can a human being find rest in this world?

Enter PEPPEL. *He is slightly tipsy, and looks disheveled and sullen. He sits down on a plank bed near the door and remains silent and motionless.*

ANNA. But has one to suffer there too?

LUKA. There'll be nothing there, nothing. Believe me. Peace and nothing more. They'll call you before the Lord and say: Look, O Lord, here's your servant Anna—

MEDVEDEV (*sharply*). How do you know what they'll say there?

At the sound of MEDVEDEV'S *voice* PEPPEL *raises his head and listens.*

LUKA. It must be I do, master sergeant—

MEDVEDEV (*in a conciliatory tone*). I—see. Well, it's your business. Though I'm not quite a master sergeant yet—

BUBNOV. I take two.

MEDVEDEV. Drat it.

LUKA. And the Lord will look at you gently and caressingly and will say: I know this Anna. Well, he'll say, conduct Anna to heaven. Let her rest—I know she's had a very hard life and is very tired. Give Anna rest—

ANNA (*gasping*). Oh, grandpa dear—if it were only like that! If I could only have rest—feel nothing—

LUKA. You won't, I tell you. You have to believe. You have to die with joy, without fear. To us, I tell you, death is like a mother to little children.

ANNA. But maybe—I'll get better?

LUKA (*ironically*). What for? For more suffering?

ANNA. Well—just to live a little longer—just a little. If there isn't going to be any suffering there, I can bear it here—yes, I can.

LUKA. There'll be nothing there. Just—

PEPPEL (*rising*). That's true— Or maybe it isn't.

ANNA (*in a frightened voice*). O God—

LUKA. Hello, handsome—

MEDVEDEV. Who's hollering?

PEPPEL (*walking up to him*). I am. Why?

MEDVEDEV. There's no call for your hollering—that's why. Every man must behave himself quietly.

PEPPEL. Blockhead! Call yourself an uncle— Ho! Ho!

LUKA (*to* PEPPEL, *in a low voice*). You there—don't shout. There's a woman dying here—her lips are already brushed with earth—don't interfere.

PEPPEL. For you, grandfather, I'll be glad to do it. You're a smart fellow. You tell lies and pleasant tales mighty well. That's all right with me. Go on lying. There's damn little in this world that's pleasant.

BUBNOV. Is the woman really dying?

LUKA. She doesn't look like she's joking—

BUBNOV. Well, then she'll stop coughing. Her coughing's been disturbing everybody. I take two.

MEDVEDEV. Ah, blast your hide!

PEPPEL. Abram.

MEDVEDEV. I'm no Abram to you.

PEPPEL. Abrashka, is Natasha ill?

MEDVEDEV. What business is that of yours?

PEPPEL. Come on, tell me: did Vassilissa beat her up badly?

MEDVEDEV. That has nothing to do with you either. It's a family affair. And who are you, anyway?

PEPPEL. Never mind who I am. But if I decide so, you'll never see Natasha again.

MEDVEDEV (*interrupting his game*). What's that? Do you know who you're talking about? That my niece should ever become— You thief!

PEPPEL. I may be a thief, but you never caught me—

MEDVEDEV. You wait. I'll catch you yet—it won't be long!

PEPPEL. If you catch me, it will be so much the worse for your whole brood. Do you think I'm going to keep mum before the court examiner? Expect good deeds from a wolf! Who kept after me to start thieving and who showed me the places? Mishka Kostylyov and his wife. Who took in what I stole? Mishka Kostylyov and his wife.

MEDVEDEV. Liar. They won't believe you.

PEPPEL. They will—because it's the truth. I'll drag you into it too —ha! I'll ruin all of you, you scoundrel, you'll see.

MEDVEDEV (*taken aback*). You're lying. Just lying. And when have I done you any harm? A mad dog, that's what you are.

PEPPEL. And when have you done me any good?

LUKA. Aha—

MEDVEDEV (*to* LUKA). What are you croaking about? You have no business here. This is a family affair.

BUBNOV (*to* LUKA). Leave off. They're not tying nooses for you and me.

LUKA (*meekly*). I know. I only say if a man hasn't done somebody good, he's done him ill.

MEDVEDEV (*missing* LUKA's *point*). That's better. Around here we all know one another. And who are you? (*Spitting like an angry cat, he goes off quickly.*)

LUKA. The gentleman lost his temper. Oh-ho-ho! You *have* got yourselves into all sorts of mix-ups, my friends—

PEPPEL. He's run to complain to Vassilissa.

BUBNOV. You're playing the fool, Vassily. What's all this showing off how brave you are? Bravery is all right when you go picking mushrooms in the woods. It's not much use in these parts. They'll wring your neck in no time here.

PEPPEL. Oh, no. We folks from Yaroslavl don't knuckle down without a fight. And if it's going to be a fight, I'm ready for it.

LUKA. Really, young man, why don't you go away from here?

PEPPEL. Where to? Can you tell me?

LUKA. Go to—Siberia.

PEPPEL. Oh, yes? No, I'll wait until I'm sent there at government expense.

LUKA. You listen to me—go to Siberia. New paths will open up for you there. Men like you are needed there.

PEPPEL. My life is cut out for me. My father spent all his life in prisons and taught me to do the same. I was only a tyke when everybody already called me a thief, a thief's son—

LUKA. Well, Siberia's a fine place—a golden land. For a man who's strong and has a good head on his shoulders it's like a hothouse for a cucumber.

PEPPEL. Why do you tell lies, old man?

LUKA. What?

PEPPEL. Gone deaf suddenly. Why do you lie, I say?

LUKA. Where do you see me lying?

PEPPEL. Everywhere. You keep saying it's fine here and it's fine there, but you know you're lying. What for?

LUKA. Well, take my word for it and go look it over for yourself. You'll thank me for it. What's the good of sticking around here? Anyway, what do you want the truth for? The truth might come down on you like an ax.

PEPPEL. I don't care. An ax is all right with me.

LUKA. You're a queer fellow. Why be your own killer?

BUBNOV. I don't understand what all this silly talk is about. What truth do you want, Vassily? And what for? You know the truth about yourself—everybody knows it.

PEPPEL. Shut up, Bubnov, don't croak. I want him to tell me— Listen, old man: Does God exist? LUKA *smiles, making no answer.*

BUBNOV. People live like chips floating down the river. The house is built, but the chips are thrown away to take care of themselves.

PEPPEL. Well? Does he? Answer me.

LUKA (*in a low voice*). If you believe in him, he exists. If you don't, he doesn't. Whatever you believe in exists.

PEPPEL, *puzzled, stares at* LUKA *in silence.*

BUBNOV. I'm going to have some tea. Come along, you two!

LUKA. Why are you looking at me?

PEPPEL. Well—wait. So you say—

BUBNOV. I'll go alone then— (*He walks toward the door as* VASSILISSA *enters.*)

PEPPEL. So you mean to say—

VASSILISSA (*to* BUBNOV). Is Nastya in?

BUBNOV. No. (*He goes off.*)

PEPPEL. Oh, it's you.

VASSILISSA (*going up to* ANNA). Still alive?

LUKA. Don't disturb her.

VASSILISSA. Why are you hanging around here?

LUKA. I can leave, if necessary.

VASSILISSA (*walking toward* PEPPEL'S *room*). I want to talk over some business with you, Vassily. (*She enters* PEPPEL'S *room, while* LUKA *moves to the hallway door, opens it, slams it loudly, and cautiously climbs over a plank bed onto the stove.*) Come here, Vassya.

PEPPEL. I don't want to.

VASSILISSA (*coming out*). Why not? What makes you cross with me?

PEPPEL. I'm bored—fed up with all this business.

VASSILISSA. Fed up with me too?

PEPPEL. Yes, with you too. (VASSILISSA *pulls her shoulder kerchief tight, pressing her hands to her breast, then walks to* ANNA'S *bed, peeps silently behind the curtain, and returns to* PEPPEL.) Well, if you have anything to say—

VASSILISSA. What is there to say? You can't force one to like you—and it's not in my character to beg for alms. Thank you for speaking the truth.

PEPPEL. What truth?

VASSILISSA. That you're fed up with me. Or isn't it true? (PEPPEL *gazes at her in silence. She moves up to him.*) Why are you staring at me? Don't you recognize me?

PEPPEL (*with a sigh*). You *are* beautiful to look at, Vassilissa— (VASSILISSA *puts an arm around his neck, but he shakes it off with a shrug of his shoulders.*) But you never touched my heart. I lived with you and all that sort of thing—but I never really cared for you—

VASSILISSA (*in a low voice*). I see— Well?

PEPPEL. Well—there's nothing we can talk about—nothing at all! Just leave me.

VASSILISSA. You've taken a fancy to somebody else?

PEPPEL. That's none of your business. If I have, I won't ask you to be my matchmaker.

VASSILISSA (*significantly*). That's a pity. I could probably get you the right party.

PEPPEL (*suspiciously*). Who do you mean?

VASSILISSA. You know who—why pretend? Vassily, I'm a straightforward person— (*Lowering her voice.*) I won't hide it—you've hurt me. For no reason whatever you struck me as if with a whip. You were telling me you loved me and then all of a sudden—

PEPPEL. It wasn't sudden at all. I've felt like that for a long time. There's no soul in you, Vassilissa. A woman must have a soul. We men are brutes. We should be—we have to be tamed and trained. And what kind of training have you been giving me?

VASSILISSA. What's gone is gone. I know we're not masters of our feelings. If you don't love me any more—all right—so be it.

PEPPEL. Well, then, that's that. We'll each go our own way, quietly, without any fuss, and that's fine.

VASSILISSA. No, wait. That's not all. When I lived with you I was always counting on you to help me get out of this mess—free me from my husband, my uncle—this whole life. Maybe it wasn't you I loved, Vassya, but this hope, this constant thought on my mind, that I loved in you. You understand? I was waiting for you to pull me out of here—

PEPPEL. You're no nail, and I'm no pair of pliers. I thought myself that with your brains—you *are* clever—and smart too—aren't you?

VASSILISSA (*bending closer to him*). Vassya, let's—help each other.

PEPPEL. How?

VASSILISSA (*quietly, but strongly*). I know you like—my sister.

PEPPEL. That's why you're so brutal—always beating her. Look out, Vassilissa. Keep your hands off her.

VASSILISSA. Wait. Don't excite yourself. It can all be done quietly—arranged in a friendly way. You want to marry Natasha? All right—marry her. I'll even give you some money—say three hundred rubles. When I've saved more, I'll give you more.

PEPPEL (*moving away from* VASSILISSA). Now just a minute—What's that for? What's the idea?

VASSILISSA. Free me from my husband— Take that noose off my neck.

PEPPEL (*whistles quietly*). So that's it! I see. Very neat on your part—the husband packed off into the grave, the lover to Siberia, and you yourself—

VASSILISSA. No, Vassya—why Siberia? You don't have to do it yourself—you can get others. And even if you do it, who'll know? Think of Natasha. And you'll have money—you'll go away somewhere—you'll free me for life—and as far as my sister's concerned, it'll be better for her, too, to be away from me. It's hard for me to see her— I get bitter because of you—and I can't restrain myself. I torment her, beat her—beat her so hard I cry myself for pity of her. But I keep beating her and will go right on doing it.

PEPPEL. A demon—that's what you are. And you're boasting about it.

VASSILISSA. I'm not boasting—I'm speaking the truth. Think, Vassya. Twice you did time on account of my husband—because of his greed. He's sucking my blood like a bedbug—been doing it for four years. What sort of a husband is that? And he's harsh with Natasha, taunts her, calls her a beggar. He's poison to everybody.

PEPPEL. There's something too clever in all this.

VASSILISSA. My meaning is clear—only a fool can fail to understand what I want.

KOSTYLYOV *enters cautiously and moves stealthily forward.*

PEPPEL (*to* VASSILISSA). Well, you'd better go now.

VASSILISSA. Think it over. (*Noticing her husband.*) What brings you here? Looking for me?

PEPPEL *jumps to his feet and stares wildly at* KOSTYLYOV.

KOSTYLYOV. It's me—it's me. And you're alone here? Ah—you have been having a chat? (*Suddenly stamps his feet and squeals at* VASSILISSA.) You slut! You dirty trash! (*He is frightened by his own voice, as the other two look at him silently without moving.*) God forgive me—you've led me into sin again, Vassilissa. I've been looking for you everywhere. (*Squealing again.*) Time to go to bed! You've forgotten to put oil in the icon lamps! You—miserable swine.

He shakes his trembling hands at VASSILISSA. *She walks slowly to the hallway, looking back at* PEPPEL.

PEPPEL (*to* KOSTYLYOV). Get out of here!

KOSTYLYOV (*shouting*). It's my house! You get out of here! Thief!

PEPPEL (*in a low voice*). Get out, Mishka!

KOSTYLYOV. Don't you dare! I'll—I'll—

PEPPEL *grabs him by the collar and shakes him. A loud shuffling and a long animal-like yawn are heard from the top of the stove.*

PEPPEL *releases* KOSTYLYOV, *who runs into the hallway screaming.*

PEPPEL (*jumping onto the plank bed*). Who's up there—on the stove?

LUKA (*popping out*). What?

PEPPEL. You?

LUKA (*calmly*). Yes—it's me—none other— O Lord Jesus Christ!

PEPPEL (*closes the hallway door and looks for the bolt, but cannot find it*). Ah, those devils! Come down, old man!

LUKA. I'm coming—right away. (*He comes down.*)

PEPPEL (*roughly*). Why did you get up on top of the stove?

LUKA. Was there somewhere else I should have gone?

PEPPEL. But you went into the hall?

LUKA. It's too cold out there for an old man like me.

PEPPEL. Did you—hear?

LUKA. I heard. How could I help hearing? I ain't deaf. Ah, what luck has come to you, my boy—what luck!

PEPPEL (*suspiciously*). What sort of luck?

LUKA. That I got up on the stove.

PEPPEL. And why did you start shuffling around up there?

LUKA. Because I felt hot—fortunately for you, my boy. Besides, I figured the fellow can make a mistake and squeeze the old man to death.

PEPPEL. Yes—I could've done that— I hate him—

LUKA. Nothing easier. Anybody could do it. People often make that mistake.

PEPPEL (*smiling*). Say, maybe you made it yourself once?

LUKA. Listen to what I'm going to tell you, my boy. You've got to cut yourself off from that woman. Don't let her come near you—ever. She'll drive her husband into the grave herself, and she'll do a neater job of it than you can—believe me! Don't listen to that witch. Look at my head. Bald, isn't it? And why? Because of these same women. I've known more of them maybe than I had hair on my head. And this Vassilissa woman is worse than a savage.

PEPPEL. I don't understand. Am I supposed to say thank you, or are you just another—

LUKA. Don't say anything. You can't improve on what I said. Better listen to me—whoever she is, the girl you like around here, take her by the arm and be off with you! Get away from here—as fast as you can!

PEPPEL (*somberly*). I can't make people out—which are kind and which are out to get you—I can't understand anything.

LUKA. What is there to understand? A man can live any which way —however his heart tells him—kind today, mean tomorrow. If that girl here has touched your heart real strong, go away with her and that's all there is to that. Or you can go away alone. You're still young —you have plenty of time to settle down with a woman.

PEPPEL (*taking* LUKA *by the shoulder*). No, tell me what are you getting out of all this?

LUKA. Now wait—let go. I want to have a look at Anna—there's been too much rattle in her breathing. (*Walks up to* ANNA'S *bed, draws the curtain, looks, touches her with his hand.* PEPPEL *watches him attentively, with a puzzled air.*) Jesus Christ, the all-merciful. Receive the soul of thy newly departed servant, Anna, with peace.

PEPPEL (*quietly*). Is she dead? (*Staying where he is, he straightens up and gazes at the bed.*)

LUKA (*quietly*). Her suffering has ended. Where's her man?

PEPPEL. Over at the inn, most likely.

LUKA. I must go tell him.

PEPPEL (*with a shudder*). I don't like dead people.

LUKA (*walking toward the hall door*). What's there to like them for? It's the living people we should like—yes, the living ones.

PEPPEL. I'll go along with you.

LUKA. Are you afraid?

PEPPEL. I don't like—

They hurry out. The place is deserted and quiet. After a time a noise is heard beyond the hallway door—it is indistinct, uneven, and unintelligible. Then the ACTOR *enters.*

ACTOR (*stops just across the threshold without closing the door, and, holding onto the jamb with both hands, shouts*). Hey, old man! Where are you? It's come back to me—listen. (*Staggering, takes two steps forward and, assuming a stage pose, recites.*)

If the world, my friends, is unable to find
The road to justice and truth,
Honor be to the madman who weaves golden dreams
Giving mankind surcease.

NATASHA *appears at the door behind the* ACTOR. Old man, listen.

If tomorrow the sun should forget to light up
Our planet's eternal path,
A thought of some madman will instantly flash
To illumine the darkened earth.

NATASHA (*laughing*). You loon! Been out getting crocked?

ACTOR (*turning to* NATASHA). Ah! It's you? And where's the old man, the darling little old man? There's nobody here, it seems. Well, farewell Natasha—yes, farewell!

NATASHA (*stepping forward*). You never said good evening, and now you're saying farewell.

ACTOR (*barring her way*). I'm leaving, going away. Spring will come, but I'll be here no more.

NATASHA. Let me pass. Where are you off to?

ACTOR. I'm going to look for a town—to get treatment. You should go too. Ophelia—get thee to a nunnery. You see, there's a hospital for organisms—for drunkards. A splendid hospital—marble everywhere—marble floors—bright, clean rooms—food—everything free! And yes, marble floors! I'll find this hospital, get cured, and once again I'll—act. I'm on the road to rebirth, as King—Lear said. My stage name is Sverchkov-Zavolzhsky—nobody knows that—nobody. I have no name here. Do you realize how it hurts to lose one's name? Even dogs have names.

NATASHA *quietly moves around the* ACTOR, *stops at* ANNA'S *bed, and looks.*

Without a name there's no man.

NATASHA. Look—but she's dead!

ACTOR (*shaking his head*). That can't be.

NATASHA (*stepping back*). Really—look.

BUBNOV *appears at the door.*

BUBNOV. Look at what?

NATASHA. Anna's—dead.

BUBNOV. That means the end of her coughing. (*Walks up to* ANNA'S *bed, looks at her, and proceeds to his own place.*) Somebody should tell Klestch about it—it's his business.

ACTOR. I'm going—I'll tell him— She's lost her name! (*He goes off.*)

NATASHA (*standing in the center of the room*). Some day I will end like that—in a basement—forgotten by everybody—

BUBNOV (*spreading some tattered clothes on his plank bed*). What? What are you mumbling there?

NATASHA. Nothing—I was talking to myself.

BUBNOV. Waiting for Vassily? Look out! He'll break your neck for you.

NATASHA. What's the difference who breaks it? I'd rather it's him.

BUBNOV (*lying down*). Well, it's up to you.

NATASHA. It's a good thing she died—but I can't help feeling sorry for her. God! What did she live for?

BUBNOV. It's like that with everybody—a man is born, lives a while, and dies. I'll die too—and so will you. Nothing to be sorry about.

Enter LUKA, *the* TARTAR, *the* GOITER, *and* KLESTCH. KLESTCH *walks slowly behind the others, stooped over.*

NATASHA. Sh-sh! Anna—

GOITER. We know— God rest her soul, if she's dead.

TARTAR (*to* KLESTCH). You must pull her out! Pull her out hallway! Here no dead people. Here live people will sleep.

KLESTCH (*in a low voice*). I'll pull her out.

They all walk up to the bed. KLESTCH *gazes at his wife over the shoulders of the others.*

GOITER (*to the* TARTAR). You think there'll be a bad smell from her? No! She dried up while she was still alive.

NATASHA. God! Not one to feel sorry for her—not a single kind word from anybody— Shame on you!

LUKA. Don't take it that way, girlie— It's all right. How can we feel sorry for the dead? Why, girlie, we don't feel sorry for the living—even for ourselves. So what can you expect?

BUBNOV (*yawning*). And another thing—death isn't afraid of words— Sickness is, but not death.

TARTAR (*moving away*). Must call police.

GOITER. The police? Positively. Did you report to the police, Klestch?

KLESTCH. No. I have to bury her—and all I have is forty kopecks.

GOITER. Well, in a case like that borrow somewhere. Or we can take up a collection—five kopecks from this one, as much as he can spare from that. But you have to report to the police—and do it quick—or they'll think you've killed the woman—or something— (*Walks to his plank bed and prepares to lie down alongside the* TARTAR.)

NATASHA (*moving away toward* BUBNOV'S *plank bed*). Now I'll be seeing her in my dreams. I always see dead people in my dreams—I'm afraid to go back alone—it's dark in the hall.

LUKA (*following her*). The people to fear are the living ones—take it from me—

NATASHA. Come with me to the door, grandpa.

LUKA. All right—let's go. *The two exit. There is a pause.*

GOITER. Oh-ho-ho! Assan! Spring is coming, friend—life will be warm again! In the villages the peasants are already mending their plows, harrows—getting ready to turn the earth—y-yes! And we? Assan! The cursed Mohammed, he's dead to the world.

BUBNOV. Tartars love to sleep.

KLESTCH (*standing in the center of the room and gazing dully into space*). What am I to do now?

GOITER. Lie down and sleep—that's all.

KLESTCH (*in a low voice*). And how—about her?

Nobody answers him. Enter SATIN *and the* ACTOR.

ACTOR (*shouts*). Old man! Come here, my faithful Kent!

SATIN. Behold the great explorer! Ho-ho!

ACTOR. It's all settled and done with! Where's the town, old man? Where are you?

SATIN. Fata-morgana! The old man lied to you. There's nothing! No town, no people—nothing!

ACTOR. You're lying!

TARTAR (*jumping up from his bed*). Where's landlord? I go see

landlord. I not sleep, I not pay money. Dead people—drunken people— (*He rushes out.* SATIN *whistles after him.*)

BUBNOV (*in a sleepy voice*). Come to bed, fellows, stop making so much noise. People are supposed to sleep at night.

ACTOR. Oh, yes—there's a dead body here. "Daddy, Daddy, have you heard? Our nets have caught a corpse"—a poem by—Shakespeare.

SATIN (*shouts*). Corpses don't hear! Corpses don't feel! Shout—yell —corpses don't hear! LUKA *appears at the door.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

A vacant plot of ground littered with junk and overgrown with weeds. At the rear a high red-brick wall cuts off the sky. Near the wall is a cluster of elder. To the right of it runs a dark log wall which is part of some kind of shed or stables. To the left is a gray wall with patches of plaster. This belongs to the KOSTYLYOV *lodging house and stands at an angle, its far corner jutting out almost to the center of the plot, and a narrow passage showing between it and the red-brick wall. In the gray wall are two windows, one at ground level, the other up about five feet and nearer the corner. Alongside this wall lie a country sledge, turned upside down, and a log about ten feet long. Piled against the wall on the right are some beams and old wooden planks.*

It is early spring, and the snow has already melted away. The black twigs of the elder bush have not yet budded. The setting sun casts a red glow on the brick wall, rear.

Sitting on the log, side by side, are NATASHA *and* NASTYA. LUKA *and the* BARON *are seated on the sledge.* KLESTCH *is lying on the heap of wood across from them.* BUBNOV'S *head is visible in the lower window.*

NASTYA (*speaking in a singsong voice, her eyes closed and her head beating time to her words*). So one night he comes to the garden, to the arbor, as we arranged—and I'm already there waiting for him a long time, trembling with fear and grief. He too is trembling all over, his face white as chalk, and a revolver in his hand—

NATASHA (*cracking sunflower seeds*). Imagine that! It seems to be true what people say about students being desperate—

NASTYA. And he says to me in a ghastly voice: My dearest, my precious love—

BUBNOV. Ho-ho! Precious?

BARON. Just a minute. Don't like it, don't listen—but don't spoil a good lie. Go on.

NASTYA. My adorable one, says he. My parents refuse to give their

consent, says he, to my taking you for my spouse and threaten to put an eternal curse on me for my love of you. On account of this, says he, I'm obliged to take my life. And the revolver in his hand is ever so big and has ten bullets in it. Farewell, dear heart, says he, nothing can make me change my mind, for I could never live without you—never! And I answered him: My never-to-be-forgotten friend—Marcel—

BUBNOV (*with surprise*). Morsel? What's that? Something to eat?

BARON (*laughing*). But listen, Nastya—last time it was Gaston!

NASTYA (*jumping to her feet*). Keep quiet, you miserable things! You're nothing but stray dogs! How can you understand what love—real love is? And I did have real love! (*To the* BARON.) You pitiful wretch! You're an educated man. You drank coffee in bed, you say—

LUKA. Now wait, folks! You mustn't interrupt her. Oblige the girl, let her have her way. It doesn't matter what's said, but why it's said. Never mind them, girlie, go on with your story.

BUBNOV. Paint your feathers, crow. Fire away!

BARON. Well, go on.

NATASHA. Take no notice of them. Who are they? They're just envious—they have nothing to say about themselves.

NASTYA (*resuming her seat*). I don't want to talk any more. No, I won't. If they don't believe me—if they laugh at me— (*She stops abruptly, pauses for a few seconds, then, closing her eyes again, continues in a fervent, loud voice, waving her hand to the beat of her speech as if listening to distant music.*) And so I reply to him: Joy of my life! My bright star! For me too it's positively impossible to live in this world—because I love you madly and will go on loving you as long as my heart beats in my breast. But, says I, you mustn't destroy your young life—as it's needed by your dear parents for whom you are their only joy— Forget me! Better that I suffer—the heartache of missing you— For I have nobody—my kind never has! Better let me be destroyed—it won't matter now! I'm not fit for anything and I've nothing—nothing— (*She covers her face with her hands and weeps silently.*)

NATASHA (*turning away from* NASTYA, *in a low voice*). Don't cry —don't! *A smile on his face,* LUKA *strokes* NASTYA'S *head.*

BUBNOV (*roars with laugher*). Damn fool!

BARON (*laughing*). Do you think this true, grandpa? She took it all from the book *Fatal Love*— It's all bunk! Don't bother with her!

NATASHA. What's that to you? Better hold your tongue—if you have no heart left in you.

NASTYA (*fiercely*). You godforsaken, empty man! Where's your soul?

LUKA (*taking* NASTYA *by the arm*). Come along, dear. Don't mind them—calm yourself. I know—I believe you. Yours is the truth, not theirs. If you believe you had a real love, then you did have it—you certainly did. And don't be angry with your Baron. Maybe he does

laugh from plain envy—maybe he never knew anything true and real in his life. Come along.

NASTYA (*pressing her hands to her breast*). Honest, grandpa, it's true, it did happen. He was a student, a Frenchman—Gaston was his name— He had a small black beard—and wore patent leather boots—may lightning strike me dead! And he loved me so dearly—so dearly!

LUKA. I know. I believe you. You say he wore patent leather boots? My goodness! And you loved him too?

The two go off around the corner.

BARON. That girl is so stupid—kind, but so unbearably stupid.

BUBNOV. What is it that makes human beings so fond of lying? As if they were always facing a court examiner—

NATASHA. Lies must be more pleasant than the truth, it seems. I too—

BARON. Well—go on.

NATASHA. I too like to imagine things. I imagine them and—wait.

BARON. For what?

NATASHA (*smiling embarrassedly*). Oh, I don't know. Maybe tomorrow, I think, somebody will come—somebody—quite different—Or maybe something will happen—something that's never happened before. I wait and wait—I'm always waiting. But really, come to think of it, what have I to wait for? *A pause.*

BARON (*ironically*). There's nothing to wait for. I don't expect anything. Everything has already happened. It's over—and done with! Go on.

NATASHA. Or sometimes I imagine that tomorrow—I'll suddenly die. It gives you such a creepy feeling. Summer is a fine time for imagining death— All those thunderstorms in summer—it's easy to get killed by lightning.

BARON. You have a hard life. That sister of yours has a devilish character.

NATASHA. And who has a good life? Nobody. I see it all around me.

KLESTCH (*until this moment motionless and indifferent, suddenly springing to his feet*). Nobody? That's a lie! Some people have it! If everybody suffered, it'd be all right. You wouldn't feel then that life's been unfair to you.

BUBNOV. What's got into you? The devil? Howling like that! Huh!

KLESTCH *lies down on the heap, as before, mumbling to himself.*

BARON. I suppose I have to go and make up with Nastya—or she won't give me anything for a drink.

BUBNOV. H'mm— People do love telling lies. With Nastya, I can understand it. She's used to painting her face—so she wants to paint her soul too—put rouge on it. But why do others do it? Take Luka for instance—he lies an awful lot—gets nothing out of it. And he's already an old man. What does he do it for?

BARON (*moving away, with a smile*). All human beings have gray little souls—and they all want to rouge them up.

LUKA (*returning from around the corner*). Look, my dear man, why do you upset the girl? You should leave her alone. Let her amuse herself by crying. You know she cries for her own pleasure—what harm does it do you?

BARON. The whole thing is stupid, old man. I'm tired of it. Today it's Marcel, tomorrow Gaston—and every day it's the same story! However, I'm off to make up with her. (*He goes.*)

LUKA. Go and be gentle with her. It never does any harm to be gentle to a human being.

NATASHA. You're a kind man, grandpa. What makes you that way?

LUKA. Kind, you say? That's all right, if it's true. (*Soft sounds of an accordion and a song drift on from behind the red wall.*) Somebody has to be kind, my girl—we have to feel sorry for people. Christ felt sorry for everybody and bid us do the same. Believe me—feeling sorry for a man at the right moment can do a lot of good. One time, for instance, I was a watchman in a country house in Siberia, near Tomsk, working for an engineer, you know. Well, the house stood in the woods, all by itself—no other homes around. It was winter and I was all alone in the house. I felt fine. One day I hear noises at a window!

NATASHA. Burglars?

LUKA. That's right. Trying to break in. Well, I picked up my rifle and went out. I look around and there I see—two men trying to open the window—and working so hard at it they didn't even notice me. I shout at them: Hey, you! Get out of here! And what do they do?—They turn around and rush at me with an ax. I warn them, Keep away, I say, or I'll shoot, and at the same time I cover them with my rifle, now one, now the other. Down on their knees they went as if begging me to let them go. But by now I felt very cross with them—for the ax, you know. You devils wouldn't go away when I told you, says I, now, says I, break off some twigs from a tree, one of you. That was done. And now, I order, one of you lie down and let the other lash him with the twigs. So by my order they gave each other a fine lashing. And after they did it they say to me, Grandpa, they say, for mercy's sake give us some bread. We've been tramping around on an empty belly. So there are your burglars, my dear— (*Laughing.*) And with an ax too! Yes, fine fellows they were, both of them. I say to them: You devils should have asked for bread right away. And they answer me— We're tired of asking. You keep asking people—and nobody gives you anything—it makes you feel pretty sore. And so they stayed with me right through the winter. One of them, Stepan, would take a rifle sometimes and go into the woods for days. The other, Yakov, was poorly, coughed all the time. And so the three of us kept watch over

that country house. When spring came they said, good-by, grandpa! and left—to tramp their way to Russia.

NATASHA. Were they runaway convicts?

LUKA. They were—they ran away from a convict camp. Fine fellows! If I hadn't felt sorry for them, they might have killed me—or something. And then they would have been tried, sent to jail, to Siberia —what sense in that? Jail doesn't teach anyone to do good, nor Siberia, but a man—yes! A man can teach another man to do good—believe me! *A pause.*

BUBNOV. Y-yes! Now *I* don't know how to tell lies. What good are they? What I say is—give 'em the whole truth just as it is. Why feel shy about it?

KLESTCH (*again jumping suddenly to his feet, as if burned, and shouting*). What truth? Where's the truth? (*Running his hands through his tatters.*) Here's the truth! No work, no strength, not even a place to live. The only thing left is to die like a dog! This is the truth! Good God! What do I want the truth for? I want to breathe more freely—that's all I ask. What have I done wrong? Why should I have been given the truth? No chance to live—Christ Almighty—not a chance—that's the truth!

BUBNOV. Whew! It certainly got him!

LUKA. Lord Jesus— Look, my friend, you should—

KLESTCH (*shaking with emotion*). You keep saying, The truth—the truth! And you, old man, keep comforting everybody. So I tell you—I hate you all—and this truth too—to hell with it. Understand? To hell with it! (*Rushes off around the corner, glancing back as he goes.*)

LUKA. My, my! How upset he got! And where is he off to?

NATASHA. He acted as if he suddenly went off his nut.

BUBNOV. A fine show, I call it. Just like on the stage— That kind of thing happens, though, every once in a while. The man hasn't got used to life yet— PEPPEL *enters slowly from around the corner.*

PEPPEL. Peace to you honest people! Well, Luka, you sly old man —still telling stories?

LUKA. You should have been here—a man was screaming his lungs out.

PEPPEL. Was it Klestch? What got into him? I saw him running as if he was on fire.

LUKA. Who won't run when it gets you right in the heart?

PEPPEL. I don't like him—he's too bitter and proud. (*Imitating* KLESTCH.) "I'm a working man"—and everybody's below him, he'll have you think. Well, work if you like it—what's there to be proud of? If we're supposed to judge people by their work, the horse is better than any man—you drive it—and it doesn't speak. Are your folks at home, Natasha?

NATASHA. They've gone to the cemetery—said they'd go to the evening mass afterward.

PEPPEL. And I've been wondering why you're free. It's a rare sight.

LUKA (*to* BUBNOV, *reflectively*). You've been saying we need the truth. But it isn't always that truth is good for what ails a man—you can't always cure the soul with truth. I remember this case, for instance. I knew a man who believed in the true and just land—

BUBNOV. Believed in what?

LUKA. In the true and just land. There must be such a land in the world, he'd say. The people in that land, says he, are of a special kind —a fine people. They respect one another, help one another, and everything they do is decent and fine. And so every day this man was thinking of going to look for that true and just land. He was a poor man, and had a hard life. But whenever things were so bad he was ready to lie down and die, he didn't let himself lose heart; he just smiled and said: It's all right—I can bear it. I'll wait a while, and then I'll give up this life and go to the true and just land. He had only one joy in life—that land—

PEPPEL. Did he go?

BUBNOV. Where? Ho! Ho!

LUKA. Then there came to that place—all this happened in Siberia —a man exiled by the government, a learned man, with books, maps, and all sorts of things like that. So our man says to the scientist: Do me a favor, please, show me where the true and just land lies and how to get there. The scientist at once opens his books, spreads his maps—looks here, looks there—there's no true and just land anywhere. Everything is right, all the lands are shown—but the true and just land is just not there.

PEPPEL (*in a low voice*). Not there? Really? BUBNOV *laughs.*

NATASHA. Don't interrupt. Go on, grandpa.

LUKA. My man doesn't believe him. It must be there, says he, look harder for it. Otherwise your books and maps, says he—they're all worthless if they fail to show the true and just land. The scientist is sore at that. My maps, says he, are the truest of all, and the true and just land doesn't exist anywhere. Hearing that, my man too gets angry. What? says he. I've lived and suffered all these years believing it exists, and your maps make out it doesn't? It's robbery! And he says to the scientist: You dirty swine. You're a crook, not a scientist. And bang! he punches him in the nose, and bang! again! (*He pauses.*) After that he went home—and hung himself.

All are silent. LUKA *looks at* PEPPEL *and* NATASHA *with a smile.*

PEPPEL (*in a low voice*). What the devil! That's not what I'd call a gay story—

NATASHA. He couldn't bear having been deceived.

BUBNOV (*somberly*). It's all tales.

PEPPEL. Y-yes. There is the true and just land for you. None such, it turns out.

NATASHA. I feel sorry for the man.

BUBNOV. It's all make-believe. Ho! Ho! The true and just land! How do you like that? Ho! Ho! Ho! (*He vanishes from his window.*)

LUKA (*nodding in the direction of* BUBNOV'S *window*). He's laughing. Hee-hee! (*He pauses.*) Well, friends, may you come to good ends. I'm leaving you soon.

PEPPEL. Where are you off to now?

LUKA. To the Ukrainians. I've heard they've discovered a new faith down there—I must have a look at it. Yes, people keep looking—keep wishing for something better. God give them patience!

PEPPEL. What's your opinion? Will they find it?

LUKA. Who, people? They'll find it. Look for something—want something with all your heart—you'll find it.

NATASHA. If they would only find something—think up something good—

LUKA. They'll think it up. Only we have to help them, girlie—make it easier for them.

NATASHA. How can I help? I get no help myself.

PEPPEL (*resolutely*). I'm going to—I will talk to you again, Natasha— Let him hear it too—he knows all about it. Come—with me!

NATASHA. Where? From one jail to another?

PEPPEL. I said I'd give up thieving. I swear I will. And I mean it. I'm not an illiterate—I'll work. Luka here says one ought to go to Siberia of his own free will. Let's go there. Don't you think I'm sick of my life? I know, Natasha, I see it all. I try to make myself feel better thinking others steal much more than I do and have honors heaped on them—but that doesn't help me—it's no answer. I'm not letting conscience prick me into saying this—I don't believe in conscience. But one thing I do know—this is not the way to live. I must live a better life. I must live—in such a way that I can respect myself—

LUKA. You're right, my boy. May the Lord Jesus Christ help you. You're right—a man must respect himself.

PEPPEL. I've been a thief from the time I was a kid. Everybody called me Vasska the thief! Vasska the thief's son! Ah, so? Then have it your way. Here I am—a thief! You must understand—I'm a thief maybe only out of spite—only because nobody ever thought of calling me by any other name. You'll call me something else, Natasha, won't you?

NATASHA (*in a melancholy tone*). I can't believe any words—somehow. And I feel uneasy today—my heart aches—as if I were expecting something to happen. I'm sorry you've started this conversation, Vassily—

PEPPEL. How long should I have waited? This isn't the first time I've brought it up.

NATASHA. Well, I don't know how I could go with you. Frankly, I can't say I love you very much. Sometimes I seem to like you. Other times it makes me sick to look at you. It must be I don't really love

you. When you love somebody you don't see anything wrong with them. I do.

PEPPEL. You'll love me all right—don't worry. I'll see you get to like me—if you'll only say yes. I've been watching you for over a year—I can see you're a good girl—strict with yourself—dependable—and I've fallen in love with you—deeply.

VASSILISSA, *in her best finery, appears at the higher window and listens, standing by the jamb.*

NATASHA. I see. You say you love me—and what about my sister?

PEPPEL (*embarrassed*). Oh, she's nothing to me. There are lots of her kind—

LUKA. Don't mind that, girlie. When there's no bread, you eat grass—

PEPPEL (*somberly*). I ask you to bear with me. Mine is a bitter life—a hungry wolf's life—there's no joy in it. I feel as if I'm sinking in a bog—whatever I lay hold of is rotten, nothing can keep me from going down. Your sister—I thought she was different. If she weren't so greedy for money—I'd have done anything for her. Only she had to be all mine. But she's after something else—she wants money—and freedom too—freedom to play around with men. She can't help me. But you—you're like a young fir tree—prickly to touch, but strong to hold on to—

LUKA. My advice too, girlie—marry him. He's all right—he's a good fellow. Only you have to remind him as often as you can that he's a good fellow—so he doesn't forget it. He'll believe you. Just keep telling him—you're a good man, Vassya, remember that! And besides, my dear, where else can you go? Your sister is a wicked wild beast, and as for her husband—well, nothing you can say about him can be as bad as he is. Then, all this life around here—it can take you nowhere. And Vassily—he's substantial, there's something to him.

NATASHA. I know I have nowhere else to go—I've thought of that myself. Only—I have no faith in anybody. But you're right, I've nowhere to go—

PEPPEL. There's one road for you here—but I won't let you go that way—I'd rather kill you.

NATASHA. There! I'm not your wife yet, and you already want to kill me.

PEPPEL (*putting his arms around her*). Stop it, Natasha. Let's not say any more!

NATASHA (*pressing close to him*). I'll say one thing, Vassily—and let God be my witness—the very first time you strike me—or wrong me in some other way—I won't spare my life—I'll either hang myself or—

PEPPEL. May my hand wither away, if I ever touch you!

LUKA. Have no doubts, dear. He needs you more than you need him.

VASSILISSA (*from the window*). Congratulations on the happy ending!

NATASHA. They're back! God, they've seen us. Oh, Vassily!

PEPPEL. What are you scared of? Nobody will dare touch you now.

VASSILISSA. Don't be afraid, Natasha. He won't beat you. He can neither beat nor love—I know.

LUKA (*in a low voice*). Oh, what a woman—a regular viper—

VASSILISSA. He's brave mostly with words— *Enter* KOSTYLYOV.

KOSTYLYOV. Natashka! What are you doing here, loafer? Scandalmongering? Complaining about your family? And all this time the samovar hasn't been prepared, the table hasn't been cleared—ah?

NATASHA. But you said you wanted to go to church.

KOSTYLYOV. What we wanted to do is none of your business! You have to see to your own work—do what you're told!

PEPPEL. You shut up! She's not your servant any more. Don't go, Natasha—don't do anything!

NATASHA. Don't you give orders—it's too early for you. (*She goes off.*)

PEPPEL (*to* KOSTYLYOV). Enough! You've bullied the girl all you're going to. Now she's mine.

KOSTYLYOV. Yours? When did you buy her? How much did you pay?

VASSILISSA *laughs loudly.*

LUKA. Go away, Vassya.

PEPPEL. Watch out you—laughers! See you don't have to cry!

VASSILISSA. Oh, how frightening! Oh, I'm so scared!

LUKA. Go away, Vassily. Don't you see she's egging you on, trying to get you worked up?

PEPPEL. Oh, so? Not me! I'll be damned if you have your own way!

VASSILISSA. And I'll be damned if I don't, Vassya!

PEPPEL (*shaking his fist at her*). We'll see about that! (*He goes off.*)

VASSILISSA (*disappearing from the window*). I'll fix you a nice wedding!

KOSTYLYOV (*walking up to* LUKA). What's doing, old man?

LUKA. Nothing doing, old man.

KOSTYLYOV. Really. I hear you're leaving?

LUKA. It's time to go.

KOSTYLYOV. Where to?

LUKA. Where my nose leads me.

KOSTYLYOV. I see, tramping about. Seems you find it uncomfortable to stay in one place?

LUKA. That's for stones. And they say even water won't flow under a stone.

KOSTYLYOV. We're not talking about stones. A man must live in one place. You can't let people live like cockroaches—crawling every which way. A man ought to stick to his place—not wander about the earth for nothing.

LUKA. What if a man's place is everywhere?

KOSTYLYOV. Then he's a tramp, a useless man. A man must be useful, he must work—

LUKA. You don't say.

KOSTYLYOV. Yes—certainly. What's a pilgrim? A pilgrim, I've heard tell, means a foreigner, a stranger. He's a strange man, not like other people. If he's really strange—if he knows something—has learned something that's of no use to anybody—it may even be some truth—but not every truth is useful—not by a long shot— Well, let him keep what he knows to himself—and hold his tongue. If he's a real pilgrim he doesn't talk—or talks so nobody understands him. He doesn't want anything, minds his own business, and doesn't stir up trouble for nothing. It's none of his business how people live. Let him follow a righteous life—live in the woods—in the thickets—out of everybody's sight. It's not for him to interfere or criticize, but to pray for everybody—for all worldly sins—mine and yours—for everything. That's why he puts worldly vanity behind him—just so he can pray. Exactly! (*He pauses.*) And what sort of pilgrim are you? You have no passport. A good man must have a passport. All good people have passports—yes.

LUKA. There are people, and there are also just plain men.

KOSTYLYOV. Don't try to be funny. And don't talk to me in riddles. I'm no more stupid than you are. What do you mean by people and men?

LUKA. This is no riddle. I say there's soil unfit for sowing, and there's fertile soil—whatever you sow on it grows— That's all the difference.

KOSTYLYOV. Well? What do you mean by that?

LUKA. Take yourself, for instance. If the Lord God himself says to you: Mikhail, be a man!—he'll be wasting his breath—as you are, so you'll stay—

KOSTYLYOV. And do you know my wife has an uncle who's a policeman? And if I— *Enter* VASSILISSA.

VASSILISSA. Come have tea, Mikhail Ivanovich.

KOSTYLYOV (*to* LUKA). Listen, you—get out of here! Clear out of the house!

VASSILISSA. Yes, old man, be off with you. Your tongue is much too sharp. And who knows—maybe you're a fugitive—

KOSTYLYOV. If I see hide or hair of you after today—I'll take steps!

LUKA. Call your uncle? Call him. Tell him you've caught a fugitive. He may get a reward—about three kopecks—

BUBNOV *reappears in the lower window.*

BUBNOV. What's up? What's being sold for three kopecks?

LUKA. He's threatening to sell me.

VASSILISSA (*to* KOSTYLYOV). Come on.

BUBNOV. For three kopecks? Watch out, old man, they'll sell you for one kopeck.

KOSTYLYOV (*to* BUBNOV). You would pop your head out like a devil in an oven!

VASSILISSA (*as she goes*). The world seems to be full of suspicious characters—and all sorts of crooks.

LUKA. Hope you'll enjoy your tea.

VASSILISSA (*glancing back*). Hold your tongue—you dirty toadstool!

She and KOSTYLYOV *disappear around the corner.*

LUKA. Tonight I'll be out of here.

BUBNOV. The best thing you can do. It's always better to go away while there's still time.

LUKA. You're right.

BUBNOV. I know what I'm talking about. I probably saved myself from Siberia by going away in time.

LUKA. Did you?

BUBNOV. That's the truth. It was this way. My wife got mixed up with a furrier. He was a fine worker—I must say—very clever in dyeing dog skins to look like raccoon—also turning cat skins into kangaroo fur—muskrat—and all sorts of other furs. He *was* clever. Well, my wife got mixed up with him, and the two of them were so close I began to be afraid they'd poison me any minute or think up some other way to get rid of me. I started beating my wife, and the furrier beat me. He was a fierce fighter. Once he pulled half my beard out and broke a rib. I got angry too—one day I whacked my wife on the head with a poker—and all in all it was quite a war going on. Well, I realized I couldn't get any place that way—they were getting the best of me. So I made up my mind to kill my wife—I was in dead earnest about it. But I woke up in time and went away instead.

LUKA. That was a better idea. Let them make dogs into raccoons.

BUBNOV. Only, my workshop was in my wife's name—and I was left —as you see me now. Though, to tell the truth, I'd have drunk up my shop anyway. You see, I have spells of heavy drinking—

LUKA. Have you? A-ah!

BUBNOV. Terrific spells. When it comes over me I drink up every little thing I have—about all I end up with is my skin. And another thing—I'm lazy. You can't imagine how I hate work.

SATIN *and the* ACTOR *enter, arguing.*

SATIN. Bunk! You'll go nowhere. It's nothing but a damn pipe dream. Look here, old man. What sort of ideas have you been giving this broken-down old windbag?

ACTOR. You lie. Grandpa, tell him he's lying. I'm going. I had work today, I swept the street—but I haven't touched vodka. How's that? Here are the thirty kopecks, but I'm sober.

SATIN. It's crazy, that's all. Give them to me—I'll drink them up for you—or gamble them away—

ACTOR. Go away! It's for the trip.

LUKA (*to* SATIN). Now why do you discourage the poor fellow?

SATIN. Tell me, O wizard, belov'd by the gods, what fate do my stars hold in store? I lost every kopeck I had, brother. The world hasn't entirely gone to the dogs, grandpa—there are still cardsharpers cleverer than I am.

LUKA. You're a jolly fellow, Konstantin, and a real pleasant one.

BUBNOV. Come here, Actor.

The ACTOR *walks over to the window and squats before* BUBNOV. *They talk in low voices.*

SATIN. In my young days I was quite amusing, old man. It's pleasant to think back to those days. I was a happy-go-lucky sort of fellow—danced beautifully, performed on the stage, liked to make people laugh—it was a fine time.

LUKA. What made you stray from the path then?

SATIN. You're very curious, old man. You want to know everything—What for?

LUKA. To understand the affairs of human beings, my man. Now I look at you and can't make you out. You're so manly, Konstantin, and you've got brains too. Why, then, suddenly—

SATIN. It's jail, old man. I was four year and seven months in jail—and after jail a man can go nowhere.

LUKA. So. And what did you do time for?

SATIN. For a dirty swine—I killed him in a fit of temper. It was in jail that I learned to play cards too.

LUKA. Did you kill because of a woman?

SATIN. Because of my sister. But don't bother me. I don't like being questioned. Besides, it was all long ago—my sister's dead—nine years since. A fine little person my sister was.

LUKA. I must say you take life lightly. Now the locksmith here let out such a scream a while ago, it was something frightful.

SATIN. Who, Klestch?

LUKA. That's the one. No work, he shouts, no nothing!

SATIN. He'll get used to it. What shall I do with myself now, I wonder?

LUKA (*quietly*). Look, here he comes.

His head bent low, KLESTCH *enters slowly.*

SATIN. Hey, widower! Why so down in the dumps? What's on your mind?

KLESTCH. I'm trying to think what to do. I've no tools. The funeral swallowed up everything.

SATIN. I'll give you a word of advice—don't do anything. Just let yourself be a burden on the world at large!

KLESTCH. You with your talk. I have some shame before other people.

SATIN. Forget it. People aren't ashamed at your living worse than a dog. Think this over—you stop working—I stop—hundreds and

thousands of others—everybody—understand?—everybody stops working. Nobody wants to do any work—what'll happen then?

KLESTCH. Everybody will drop dead from hunger.

LUKA (*to* SATIN). You ought to join the Wanderers with your ideas. There are such people, called Wanderers.*

SATIN. I know—they're no fools, grandpa.

From the KOSTYLYOVS' *window come* NATASHA'S *cries:* "What have I done wrong? Please, what have I done?"

LUKA (*with alarm*). Sounds like Natasha. Oh, God!

Noise, uproar, the sound of dishes being smashed in the KOSTYLYOVS' *apartment.*

KOSTYLYOV (*off stage*). You heathen—you slut—

VASSILISSA (*off*). Wait, I'll fix her—

NATASHA (*off*). They're beating me! They're killing me!

SATIN (*shouting through the window*). Hey, you there!

LUKA (*fidgeting*). We ought to call Vassily— Oh, God! Boys, friends—

ACTOR (*running off*). I'll get him—

BUBNOV. They do beat her an awful lot now.

SATIN. Come on, old man—we'll be witnesses.

LUKA (*following* SATIN). I'm no good as a witness—no! If only Vassily would come quick— (*The two go off.*)

NATASHA (*off stage*). Vassilissa! Sister! Vassi—

BUBNOV. They've gagged her— I'll go look—

The disturbance in the KOSTYLYOV *apartment dies down, apparently moving out of the room into the hall.* LUKA'S *shout,* "Stop!" *is heard. A door is slammed loudly, chopping off the noise as with a hatchet. All is quiet on the stage. Twilight.*

KLESTCH (*he is sitting indifferently on the upturned sleigh, rubbing his hands hard. Then he begins muttering something—at first indistinctly*). How now? I have to live— (*Raising his voice.*) I have to have a place to live in—don't I? I haven't one. I have nothing. Only myself. Just one solitary being. No help from anybody.

Hunching over, he goes off slowly. There are a few seconds of sinister silence. Then a low, confused din rises somewhere in the passage. It swells and draws nearer. Individual voices can be distinguished off stage.

VASSILISSA. I'm her sister! Let go!

KOSTYLYOV. What right have you?

VASSILISSA. Jailbird!

SATIN. Call Vassya, quick! Lay into him, Goiter!

A police whistle is heard. The TARTAR, *his right arm in a sling, rushes on.*

* A Russian religious sect dating from the time of Peter the Great and called Wanderers (or sometimes Runners) because they preached running away from places where the government-instituted religious reforms were being enforced—TRANSLATOR.

TARTAR. What such law is there—kill in daytime?

The GOITER *enters, followed by* MEDVEDEV.

GOITER. Ah, what a wallop I gave him!

MEDVEDEV. How dare you strike people?

TARTAR. And you? What's your duty?

MEDVEDEV (*running after the* GOITER). Stop. Give me my whistle.

KOSTYLYOV *runs on.*

KOSTYLYOV. Abram! Catch him—arrest him!

KVASHNYA *and* NASTYA *come on from around the corner, supporting a disheveled* NATASHA *under the arms. They are followed by* SATIN, *stepping backward as he fends off* VASSILISSA, *who, arms waving, tries to reach out and hit* NATASHA. ALYOSHKA *skips madly around* VASSILISSA, *blowing a whistle into her ears, shouting, and yelling. A few tattered figures, men and women, drift on to join the others.*

SATIN (*to* VASSILISSA). Where are you pushing? You damned hoot owl—

VASSILISSA. Keep away, jailbird! I'll tear her to pieces if it kills me too!

KVASHNYA (*moving* NATASHA *away*). Come, Vassilissa. You ought to be ashamed. Stop acting like a wild animal.

MEDVEDEV (*catching hold of* SATIN). Now I've got you!

SATIN. Goiter! Give it to them! Vasska! Vasska!

NATASHA *is led to the pile of wood, right, where she can sit down. The rest are bunched together near the passage, against the red wall.* PEPPEL, *rushing out of the passage, elbows his way through the crowd silently and vigorously.*

PEPPEL. Where's Natasha? Ah, it's you—

KOSTYLYOV *slips around the corner.*

KOSTYLYOV (*off stage*). Abram! Get hold of Vasska! Boys, help him catch Vasska! He's a robber, a thief!

PEPPEL. Ah, you old goat!

Swinging his fist, he belabors KOSTYLYOV. *The latter falls to the ground, only the upper part of his body showing around the corner.* PEPPEL *dashes over to* NATASHA.

VASSILISSA. Do something to Vasska! All you good people, beat him up—the dirty thief!

MEDVEDEV (*shouting to* SATIN). Keep out of this! This is a family affair! They're relations—and who are you?

PEPPEL. What did she do to you? Stab you?

KVASHNYA. Just look what the brutes did—scalded the girl's feet with boiling water.

NASTYA. Toppled the samovar on her.

TARTAR. Maybe accident— You must know certain—you mustn't talk if you not know—

NATASHA (*almost fainting*). Take me away, Vassily—hide me—

VASSILISSA. My God! Look! He's dead. They've killed him—

Everybody crowds around KOSTYLYOV *in the passage.* BUBNOV *comes out of the crowd and walks up to* PEPPEL.

BUBNOV (*in a low voice*). Look, Vasska. The old man is—you know what—finished.

PEPPEL (*looking at* BUBNOV *without understanding a word*). Go call somebody—to take her to a hospital— Well, I'll get even with them!

BUBNOV. I was saying—somebody has flattened the old man—

The noise on the stage dies down like a campfire doused with water. Random exclamations uttered in undertones can be heard: "Is it really?" "What do you know!" "Well?" "Let's get away from here." "Oh, hell!" "Now look out!" *The crowd dwindles.* BUBNOV, *the* TARTAR, NASTYA, *and* KVASHNYA *rush over to* KOSTYLYOV's *body.*

VASSILISSA (*rises from the ground and shouts*). They've killed him! They've killed my husband! (*In a triumphant voice.*) Here's the murderer. Vasska did it. I saw it. Good people, I saw it with my own eyes. Well, Vassya? What'll you say to the police now?

PEPPEL (*leaving* NATASHA). Get out of the way! (*Gazes at the dead man. To* VASSILISSA.) Well? You're glad? (*Touches the body with his foot.*) The old pig has popped off! You've had your way. Well, I'd better finish you off too!

He makes a dash for her, but SATIN *and the* GOITER *stop him quickly.* VASSILISSA *flees into the passage.*

SATIN. Come to your senses!

GOITER. Whoa! Where are you galloping? VASSILISSA *returns.*

VASSILISSA. Now what, my dear friend Vassya? One can't escape his fate. Call the police inspector, Abram! Blow your whistle!

MEDVEDEV. They've swiped my whistle, those bastards!

ALYOSHKA. Here it is— (*He blows the whistle.* MEDVEDEV *runs after him.*)

SATIN (*leading* PEPPEL *to* NATASHA). Don't be afraid, Vasska! Killing a man in a fight is nothing serious. It doesn't cost much—

VASSILISSA. Hold Vasska! He killed him— I saw him do it!

SATIN. I punched the old man a few times myself. He didn't need much to keel over. Call me as a witness, Vasska.

PEPPEL. I need no alibis. What I need is to get Vassilissa into it, and that I will do. It was she who wanted all this—egged me on to kill her husband!

NATASHA (*suddenly, in a loud voice*). Oh, now I understand! So that's it, Vassily? Kind people! They're in this together! My sister and him—they're together! They've plotted all this. Isn't that so, Vassily? You talked to me today the way you did—so she'd hear everything? Kind people! She's his mistress—you know that—everybody knows it—they're both guilty! It was she who got him to kill her husband—He was in their way—and I was too. So they've maimed me—

PEPPEL. Natasha—what are you saying?

SATIN. What the hell.

VASSILISSA. Liar! She lies—I—it was he, Vasska—he killed him!

NATASHA. They're in it together! I curse you! I curse you both!

SATIN. Such goings on! Watch out, Vassily! They'll be the death of you.

GOITER. This is more than I can understand. Good God, what a business!

PEPPEL. Do you really mean it, Natasha? Do you really believe that I and she—

SATIN. Honest, Natasha, think—

VASSILISSA (*in the passage*). My husband has been killed, sir. Vasska Peppel, the thief—he killed him, Inspector. I saw it—everybody saw it—

NATASHA (*tossing about, almost unconscious*). Kind people! My sister and Vasska killed him. Listen to me, police! That one, my sister, taught—got him—her lover—there he is, damn him—they killed the man! Arrest them—try them. Take me too—to jail! For Christ's sake, take me to jail!

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The same setting as the first act. The partitions forming PEPPEL'S *room have been removed, and the room no longer exists. Lying in that corner now is the* TARTAR; *he is restless and groans occasionally. The wood block with anvil, at which* KLESTCH *used to work, is also gone.* KLESTCH *himself is sitting at the table tinkering with an accordion and trying the scales. At the other end of the table are* SATIN, *the* BARON, *and* NASTYA. *In front of them they have a bottle of vodka, three bottles of beer, and a big chunk of black bread. The* ACTOR *is on the stove, and can be heard moving about and coughing.*
It is night. The place is lit by a lamp standing in the center of the table. Outside a wind is blowing.

KLESTCH. Y-yes—it was during all that mix-up that he disappeared.

BARON. Vanished from the police—like unto smoke fleeing from the face of fire.

SATIN. Thus do sinners vanish from the sight of the righteous.

NASTYA. He was a good old man. And you—you're not men, you're just rust.

BARON (*drinking*). Here's to you, your ladyship!

SATIN. Yes, he was an interesting old gaffer. Nastya fell plumb in love with him.

NASTYA. I did fall in love with him. I won't deny it. He saw—he understood everything—

SATIN (*laughing*). And, all in all, to quite a few people he was like soft bread to the toothless.

BARON (*laughing*). Like plaster to an abscess.

KLESTCH. He had pity for other people. You haven't.

SATIN. What good will it do you if I pity you?

KLESTCH. You know—well, if not how to pity a man—you know how not to hurt him.

TARTAR (*sitting up on his plank bed and rocking his wounded arm, as if it were a baby*). Old man was good. He had the law in his soul. Who has the law in his soul—he is good. Who lost the law, he is lost.

BARON. What kind of law, Assan?

TARTAR. Different kind. You know what kind.

BARON. Go on.

TARTAR. Not hurt a man—this is the law!

SATIN. It's called "The code of criminal and reformatory penalties."

BARON. Also "The code of penalties imposed by Justices of the Peace."

TARTAR. Is called Koran. Your Koran called the law. In every soul must be Koran—yes.

KLESTCH (*trying the accordion*). Damn it, listen to it hiss. Assan is right. We must live according to the law—according to the Gospels—

SATIN. Do that.

BARON. Yes, try it.

TARTAR. Mohammed gave Koran, said: Here is law! Do as written here. Then time come—Koran is not enough—time will give new law. Every new time will give its law.

SATIN. That's right. Time came, and it gave us the Penal Code. A strong law—not to be worn out in a hurry.

NASTYA (*banging on the table with her glass*). Why do I go on living with you—here? I'm going away—anywhere—to the world's end!

BARON. Without shoes, your ladyship?

NASTYA. Stark naked! Even if I have to crawl on all fours!

BARON. It'll make a delightful picture, your ladyship—particularly on all fours.

NASTYA. Yes, I'm willing to crawl—just so long as I don't have to see your pan any more. Oh, I'm so disgusted with everything—with all life—all people!

SATIN. When you leave, take the Actor with you. He's about ready to go there too. It's come to his knowledge that half a mile from the world's end there is a hospital for organons—

ACTOR (*peeping out from the top of the stove*). For organisms, you fool!

SATIN. For organons poisoned by alcohol—

ACTOR. And he will go! Yes, he will. Just wait!

BARON. Who's he, sir?

ACTOR. I!

BARON. Thank you, servant of the goddess—what's her name?—the goddess of drama, of tragedy—what was she called?

ACTOR. A muse, fathead! A muse, not a goddess.

SATIN. Lachesis—Hera—Aphrodite—Atropos—devil knows which. Do you see what the old man did, Baron? It was he who worked the Actor up to this state.

BARON. The old man is a fool—

ACTOR. Savages! Ignoramuses! Mel-po-me-ne! Clods! He'll go, you'll see. "Guzzle ye, O somber minds"—a poem by Béranger—yes! He'll find himself a place where there's no—no—

BARON. Where there's nothing, sir?

ACTOR. Yes, nothing! "This hole—my grave will be— I die of sickness and infirmity!" Why do you live? Why?

BARON. You, Edmund Kean or Genius and Dissipation! Stop yelling!

ACTOR. Not on your life! I will yell!

NASTYA (*lifts her head from the table and flings her arms out*). Yell! Let 'em hear you!

BARON. What's the sense, your ladyship?

SATIN. Leave them alone, Baron! To hell with them! Let them holler! Let them split their heads wide open! There's sense enough in that! Keep out of people's way, as the old man used to say. Yes, he was like yeast, leavening our crowd here—

KLESTCH. He beckoned them to go somewhere, but he didn't show them the road.

BARON. The old man is a faker.

NASTYA. Liar! You're a faker yourself.

BARON. Shush, your ladyship.

KLESTCH. The old man didn't like the truth—dead set against it, he was— And he was right. I say too—what can we do with the truth when even without it we can't breathe? There's Assan—had his arm crushed on the job—it'll have to be cut off, I suppose—that's truth for you.

SATIN (*banging on the table with his fist*). Shut up, you brutes, numskulls! That's enough about the old man! (*In a calmer tone.*) You're the worst of all, Baron. You understand nothing—and lie. The old man is not a faker. What's truth? Man—that's the truth! He understood this—you don't. You're dull, like a brick. I understand the old man—I do. Certainly he lied—but it was out of pity for you, the devil take you! There are lots of people who lie out of pity for others—I know it—I've read about it. They lie beautifully, excitingly, with a kind of inspiration. There are lies that soothe, that reconcile one to his lot. There are lies that justify the load that crushed a worker's arm—and hold a man to blame for dying of starvation—I know lies!

People weak in spirit—and those who live on the sweat of others—these need lies—the weak find support in them, the exploiters use them as a screen. But a man who is his own master, who is independent and doesn't batten on others—he can get along without lies. Lies are the religion of slaves and bosses. Truth is the god of the free man.

BARON. Bravo! Splendid! I agree with you. You speak—like a decent man.

SATIN. Why shouldn't a cheat speak well sometimes, when the decent people—speak like cheats? Yes, I've forgotten a lot, but I still know some things. The old man had a head on his shoulders. He had the same effect on me as acid on an old, dirty coin. Let's drink to his health! Fill the glasses—

NASTYA *pours a glass of beer and hands it to* SATIN, *who continues with a smile.*

The old man lives from within—he looks at everything through his own eyes. I asked him once: Grandpa, what do people live for? (*Trying to imitate* LUKA'S *voice and manner.*) "They live for something better to come, my friend. Let's say, there are cabinetmakers. They live on, and all of them are just trash. But one day a cabinetmaker is born—such a cabinetmaker as has never been seen on this earth—there's no equal to him—he outshines everybody. The whole cabinetmaking trade is changed by him—and in one jump it moves twenty years ahead. Likewise, all the rest—locksmiths, say—cobblers and other working people—and peasants, too—and even the masters—they all live for something better to come. They live a hundred—and maybe more years for a better man."

NASTYA *regards* SATIN *fixedly.* KLESTCH *stops work on the accordion and listens. The* BARON, *his head bowed low, drums quietly with his fingers on the table. The* ACTOR, *leaning over from the stove, cautiously tries to lower himself onto the plank bed.*

"Everybody, my friend, everybody lives for something better to come. That's why we have to be considerate of every man— Who knows what's in him, why he was born and what he can do? Maybe he was born for our good fortune—for our greater benefit. And most especially we have to be considerate of youngsters. Kids need plenty of elbowroom. Don't interfere with their life. Be kind to them."

BARON (*reflectively*). H'm—for something better to come? That reminds me of our family. An old family—goes back to the time of Catherine the Great—noblemen—warriors! The founders came from France. They served the government, kept rising higher and higher. In the reign of Nicholas I my grandfather, Gustave Debil, held a high post— There was wealth—hundreds of serfs—horses—cooks—

NASTYA. Liar! There was not!

BARON (*jumping to his feet*). What? Well, go on.

NASTYA. There wasn't.

BARON (*shouting*). A house in Moscow! A house in St. Petersburg! Carriages—with the coat of arms!

KLESTCH *picks up the accordion and, moving to one side, watches the scene.*

NASTYA. There wasn't!

BARON. Shut up! I say dozens of flunkies!

NASTYA (*with relish*). There wasn't.

BARON. I'll kill you.

NASTYA (*ready to run off*). There weren't any carriages!

SATIN. Chuck it, Nastya! Don't tease him.

BARON. Just wait—you scum! My grandfather—

NASTYA. There was no grandfather! There was nothing!

SATIN *laughs.*

BARON (*exhausted by his outburst, sits down on the bench*). Satin, tell this slut— You're laughing too? You don't believe me either? (*Shouts in despair, banging the table.*) There was, the devil take you!

NASTYA (*triumphantly*). A-ah, you scream? You understand now how it feels when somebody doesn't believe you?

KLESTCH (*returning to the table*). I thought there was going to be a fight—

TARTAR. A-ah, people are stupid. Very bad.

BARON. I can't permit anybody to insult me! I have proofs—documents, damn it!

SATIN. Chuck them! And forget about your grandfather's carriages. In the carriages of the past you can't go anywhere.

BARON. But how dare she?

NASTYA. Imagine! How dare I!

SATIN. You see, she dares. Is she any worse than you? Although, in her past—she certainly didn't have not only carriages and a grandfather, but even a father and mother—

BARON (*calming down*). Damn you—you can reason calmly. I don't seem to have any character—

SATIN. Get yourself one. They're useful. (*A pause.*) Have you been visiting the hospital, Nastya?

NASTYA. What for?

SATIN. To see Natasha.

NASTYA. A little late, aren't you? She left the hospital a long time ago. She came out—and vanished. Nobody's seen her anywhere.

SATIN. She must have evaporated—fizzed out.

KLESTCH. It'll be interesting to see which one does the most to ruin the other one—whether Vasska drags Vassilissa down, or the other way around.

NASTYA. Vassilissa will wriggle out of it—she's clever. And Vasska will go to Siberia.

SATIN. The penalty for killing in a fight is only jail.

NASTYA. That's a pity. Siberia's more his style. I wish you'd all be packed off to Siberia—or swept off like dirt—into some pit.

SATIN (*startled*). Have you gone raving mad?

BARON. I'll bloody her nose—for her impertinence.

NASTYA. You try—just touch me.

BARON. I certainly will.

SATIN. Drop it. Don't touch her. Don't hurt another human being. I can't get that old man out of my head. (*Laughs.*) Don't hurt another human being! But I was hurt once—hurt for the rest of my life with a single blow. What am I supposed to do? Forgive it? Not on your life! Never!

BARON (*to* NASTYA). You have to understand once and for all, you're not my equal. You're—dirt under my feet!

NASTYA. You good-for-nothing! Why, you're living off me like a worm off an apple. *The men all burst into laughter.*

KLESTCH. A sweet little apple! Ah, what a crackbrain!

BARON. You can't be cross with this idiot!

NASTYA. You're laughing? You faker! You don't think it's funny.

ACTOR (*somberly*). Give it to them good!

NASTYA. If I had the power—I'd smash you all like this! (*She picks up a cup from the table and smashes it on the floor.*)

TARTAR. Why break cup? Such—pighead!

BARON (*rising*). I'll teach her good manners!

NASTYA (*running toward the hall door*). You go to hell!

SATIN (*after her*). Hey! Stop it! Who are you scaring? And what's it all about, anyway?

NASTYA. Beasts! I hope you'll be struck dead! Beasts! (*She disappears into the hallway.*)

ACTOR (*somberly*). Amen.

TARTAR. Oh! Russian woman, spiteful woman! Too free! Tartar woman—no! She know the law! Nothing stop her!

KLESTCH. She needs a good beating.

BARON. What a bitch!

KLESTCH (*trying the accordion*). It's finished. But no sign of the owner. The boy is on a binge again.

SATIN. Have a drink.

KLESTCH. Thanks! It's time to turn in too.

SATIN. Getting used to us?

KLESTCH (*downs his drink and moves to his plank bed in the corner*). It's all right. It's the same human beings everywhere. At first, you don't see it. Then, you get a good look at them, and it turns out they're all human beings—they're all right.

The TARTAR *spreads out some garment on his plank bed, kneels down, and begins to pray.*

BARON (*to* SATIN, *pointing at the* TARTAR). Look.

SATIN. Leave him alone. He's a good fellow. (*Laughs.*) I'm in a kind mood today—the devil knows why.

BARON. You're always kind when you're oiled—kind and brainy.

SATIN. When I'm drunk I like everything. Yes, sir. He's praying? Fine. A man can believe or not believe—it's his own affair. A man is free—he pays for everything himself—for belief and disbelief, for love, for intelligence, and that makes him free. Man—that's the truth. What is man? It's not you, nor I, nor they— No, it's you, I, they, the old man, Napoleon, Mohammed—all in one. (*Outlines the figure of a man in the air.*) You understand? It's tremendous! In this are all the beginnings and all the ends. Everything in man, everything for man. Only man exists, the rest is the work of his hands and his brain. Man! It's magnificent! It has a proud ring! Man! We have to respect man, not pity him, not demean him— Respect him, that's what we have to do. Let's drink to man, Baron! (*Rises.*) It's good to feel oneself a man! I'm a jailbird, a murderer, a cheat—granted! When I walk down the street, people look at me as at a crook—they side-step and glance back at me—and often say to me: Scoundrel! Charlatan! Work! Work? For what? So that I have what my body needs and feel satisfied? (*Laughs.*) I've always despised people whose main thought in life is to feel satisfied. That's not important, Baron—no! Man is above that! Man is above satisfaction!

BARON (*shaking his head*). You can reason. It's a fine thing—it must warm your heart. I haven't got that—I can't reason. (*Looks around and speaks in a low voice, cautiously.*) I feel scared sometimes, old fellow. You know? I get panicky. Because, what's to become of me?

SATIN (*walking up and down*). Nonsense! What can a man fear?

BARON. You know, ever since I can remember myself I've always felt a sort of fog in my head. I could never understand anything. I have an awkward feeling as if all my life I've done nothing but change clothes— But to what end? I can't figure it out. I was given education, wore the uniform of a college for the nobility—but what did I study? I don't remember. I got married—to a woman who was no good, wore tails, then a dressing gown—why? I don't know. I went through my fortune—came to wear an old gray jacket and faded pants— But how did I go broke? I didn't notice. I got a job on a government board—wore a uniform, a cap with a badge—then embezzled government money, had prison clothes put on me, and later changed into this. And all that as if in a dream. It's funny.

SATIN. Not very. Stupid, rather.

BARON. Yes—I too think it's stupid. Yet there must have been some purpose that I was born for—don't you think?

SATIN (*laughing*). Probably. A man is born for something better to come. (*Nods his head.*)

BARON. That Nastya! Where did she run off to? I'd better go look. After all, she's— (*He goes out. There is a pause.*)

ACTOR. Tartar! (*A pause.*) Assan! (*The* TARTAR *turns his head.*) Pray—for me.

TARTAR. What?

ACTOR (*in a lower voice*). Pray—for me.

TARTAR (*after a pause*). Pray yourself.

ACTOR (*coming down hurriedly from the stove, walks up to the table, pours himself some vodka with a trembling hand, downs it, and almost runs into the hallway*). I'm gone.

SATIN. Hey you, sycamore! Where are you going? (*He whistles.*)

Enter MEDVEDEV, *wearing a woman's quilted jacket, and* BUBNOV. *They are both slightly drunk.* BUBNOV *carries a string of pretzels in one hand and a few small smoked fishes in the other, with a bottle of vodka under his arm and another sticking out of his pocket.*

MEDVEDEV. The camel is a kind of—donkey, only without ears.

BUBNOV. Forget it. You're kind of a donkey yourself.

MEDVEDEV. The camel has no ears at all—he hears with his nostrils.

BUBNOV (*to* SATIN). Friend! I've been looking for you in all the barrooms. Take a bottle, my hands are full.

SATIN. Put the pretzels on the table and that'll free your hand.

BUBNOV. You're right, by God! Look, policeman—here's a clever fellow, isn't he?

MEDVEDEV. Crooks are all clever—I know. They can't do without brains. A good man can be stupid and still be good. But a bad man must have brains—absolutely. As for the camel, you're wrong. He's a beast of burden, and has no horns—nor teeth—

BUBNOV. Where is everybody? Why isn't there anybody here? Hey you! Come out! I'm treating everybody! Who's over in the corner?

SATIN. How soon are you going to drink up your money? Scarecrow!

BUBNOV. It'll be soon. This time I've saved up only a little capital. Goiter! Where's Goiter?

KLESTCH (*walking up to the table*). He's out.

BUBNOV. B-rr! Fido! Brlyn—brlyn—brlyn! Turkey! Don't bark, don't cackle! Drink! Enjoy yourselves! Get out of the dumps! I'm treating everybody. I love treating people. If I was rich—I'd have a free barroom—you bet I would. With music—and a choir singing too. Everybody could come, drink, eat, listen to songs—ease their hearts! You're a poor man? Step right in—into my free barroom! Satin! I'd make you—I'd give you half of all my capital! There!

SATIN. Give me all you have now.

BUBNOV. My whole capital? Now? Take it. Here's a ruble—here's a quarter—here are the coppers—everything!

SATIN. That's fine. They'll be safer in my hands—I'll have a game with them—

MEDVEDEV. I'm witness—the money's been given for safekeeping—to what amount?

BUBNOV. You? You're a camel. We don't need witnesses.

Enter ALYOSHKA, *barefoot.*

ALYOSHKA. Folks! I got my feet wet.

BUBNOV. Come! Wet your whistle! That'll set you right. My dear fellow—you sing and play—that's fine. But you shouldn't drink. Drinking's bad for a person, my friend. It certainly is.

ALYOSHKA. I can tell that by looking at you. The only time you look like a man is when you're drunk. Klestch, have you fixed my accordion? (*Sings, dancing.*)

If this here phiz
Weren't so fair to see,
My girl wouldn't be
So sweet on me.

I'm shivering, boys. It's cold.

MEDVEDEV. H'mm!—And may I ask who the girl friend is?

BUBNOV. Leave him alone. You're off the police force now, my friend. It's all over, finished. You're neither a policeman nor an uncle any more.

ALYOSHKA. Just Aunt Kvashnya's husband.

BUBNOV. One of your nieces is in jail, the other is dying.

MEDVEDEV (*haughtily*). Liar! She's not dying—she's missing!

SATIN *laughs.*

BUBNOV. It's all the same, brother. A man without nieces is no uncle.

ALYOSHKA. Your Excellency! (*Sings.*)

My girl friend has money,
I haven't a sou!
But I'm a gay lad,
And the girls think so too!

Damn, it's cold.

Enter the GOITER. *From time to time, up till the end of the act, other figures, men and women, come in. They undress for sleep and take their places on the plank beds, muttering to themselves.*

GOITER. Bubnov! Why did you run away?

BUBNOV. Come here! Sit down. Now let's sing—you know, my favorite—eh?

TARTAR. Night all must sleep. Sing song daytime.

SATIN. It's all right, Assan! Come over here!

TARTAR. How is all right? Will be noise. When you sing song, is noise.

BUBNOV (*walking up to the* TARTAR). How's your hand, Assan? Have they cut it off?

TARTAR. Why cut off? I wait. Maybe they no have cut it off. Hand is not iron, you cut it off quick.

GOITER. You're in a rotten way, Assan. Without a hand you're no

good for anything. The likes of us are valued for their hands and their backs. No hand, no man. Yes, yours is a bad case. Come have some vodka—and to hell with it all! *Enter* KVASHNYA.

KVASHNYA. Ah, my dear lodgers! And isn't it terrible outdoors? Cold —wet! Is my policeman here? Policeman!

MEDVEDEV. Here I am.

KVASHNYA. Wearing my blouse again? And from the looks of it—a bit under the influence, ain't you? How does that happen?

MEDVEDEV. It's on account of his birthday—Bubnov's— And it's cold and wet.

KVASHNYA. Wet! Look out! Don't give me any of that! Go to bed.

MEDVEDEV (*going off to the kitchen*). To bed—that I can—I want to go to bed—it's time.

SATIN. You *are* strict with him. Why?

KVASHNYA. You can't be otherwise, my friend. A man like him has to be kept in line. I took him on for a companion thinking I'd benefit by it—after all, he's a military man, and you're wild people, while I'm only a woman— And right off the bat he takes to drink! That's of no use to me.

SATIN. You didn't choose your assistant very well.

KVASHNYA. No, you're wrong. You wouldn't want to live with me —you wouldn't have me. And even if you did, within a week you'd gamble me away at cards—me and my tripe!

SATIN (*laughing*). You're right there, landlady. I certainly would.

KVASHNYA. There you are. Alyoshka!

ALYOSHKA. Here he is—that's me.

KVASHNYA. What sort of tales are you telling about me?

ALYOSHKA. Me? I tell everything—just as it is, honestly. There's a woman, says I. A remarkable woman. In flesh, fat, and bones she's a heavyweight twice over. But she hasn't an ounce of brains!

KVASHNYA. Now, that's a lie. I have plenty of brains. But why do you say I beat my policeman?

ALYOSHKA. I thought you were beating him when you pulled his hair.

KVASHNYA (*laughing*). You're a fool! As if you didn't see. Why carry dirt out of the house? Besides, it hurt his pride. He took to drink because of your tales.

ALYOSHKA. Then it's true what they say—hens drink too.

SATIN *and* KLESTCH *laugh.*

KVASHNYA. You do have a wicked tongue! I can't make out what sort of man you are, Alyoshka.

ALYOSHKA. The very finest sort of man! Can do anything. Something catches my eye, and off I fly.

BUBNOV (*near the* TARTAR'S *plank bed*). Come along. We'll keep you awake anyway. We'll be singing—all night. Goiter!

GOITER. Want a song? All right.

ALYOSHKA. I'll play the accompaniment.

SATIN. I'm all ears.

TARTAR (*smiling*). Well, devil Bubnov—now we have some your vodka. Drink we will, play we will, death will come, die we will!

BUBNOV. Fill his glass, Satin. Sit down, Goiter. Ah, friends! A man doesn't need much, does he? Here am I—I've had some drink—and I'm happy. Goiter, start my favorite one. I'll sing and weep!

GOITER (*sings*). The sun comes up, the sun goes down again—

BUBNOV (*picking it up*). But in my cell it's never light—

The hallway door is flung open. The BARON, *standing on the threshold, shouts.*

BARON. Hey, you! Come—come here! Out there—in the vacant lot the Actor—has hanged himself!

There is a general silence. Everybody gazes at the BARON. NASTYA *appears from behind the* BARON'S *back and slowly, her eyes wide open, walks up to the table.*

SATIN (*in a low voice*). Ah, spoiled the song—the fool!

CURTAIN

BARBARIANS

THE background of this play takes one back to the early years of this century when there still were in Russia great numbers of quiet little towns that had no railway connections and could be reached only by road. The town of Verkhopolye in "Barbarians" lies in central Russia, perhaps not far from the upper Volga. Its traditional way of life is seldom disturbed. Few visitors come there—it has only one bug-ridden hotel; and with no high school for boys and only an intermediate school for girls, people of education are rare among its residents. The administrative and police functions are centered in the hands of a government official, the *Ispravnik,* who for want of a better term is called "the Chief of Police" in this translation. An elected mayor and a town council look after the welfare of the town but enjoy a rather limited authority. The local "society" in such small towns is usually headed by the Chief of Police and is made up of a few resident landowners (the "nobility"), a sprinkling of men of liberal professions, and government officials of various ranks. Card games for high stakes are usually the most exciting events in the life of such communities, and the fact that "post-office clerk so-and-so lost 200 rubles last night" may be the most absorbing subject of conversation, particularly when it is remembered that the post-office clerk's salary is probably not more than 50 or 60 rubles a month.

The clash between sophisticated civilization and native primitivism as pictured in "Barbarians" results in injuries to both sides. But it is well to remember that the quiet little towns like Verkhopolye had enough drunkenness and corruption of their own and needed but little outside help for boys like Grisha to become drunkards or for petty officials like Drobyazgin to run away with government money.

A. B.

BARBARIANS

CHARACTERS

Ivakin, gardener and beekeeper, age 50
Yefim, worker employed by Ivakin, age 40
Matvey Gogin, a peasant boy, age 23
Dunka's Husband, a person of indefinite profession, age 40
Pavlin Savelyevich Golovastikov, age 60
Maria Ivanovna Vesyolkina, daughter of the local postmaster, age 22
Porphiry Drobyazgin, a Treasury clerk, age 25
Arkhip Fomich Pritykin, timber merchant, about 35
Dr. Makarov, age 40
Mavriky Osipovich Monakhov, revenue collector, age 40
Lydia Pavlovna Bogayevskaya, age 28
Nadezhda Polikarpovna Monakhova, wife of Monakhov, age 28
Pelageya Ivanovna Pritykina, Pritykin's wife, age 45
Tatyana Nikolayevna Bogayevskaya, a gentlewoman with property in the town, Lydia's aunt, age 55
Vassily Ivanovich Redozubov, mayor, age 60
Stepan Danilovich Lukin, student, Ivakin's nephew, age 25
Sergey Nikolayevich Tsyganov, engineer, age 45
Anna Fyodorovna Cherkun, wife of Yegor Petrovich Cherkun, age 23
Styopa, the Cherkuns' maid, age 20
Yegor Petrovich Cherkun, engineer, age 32
Grisha, Redozubov's son, age 20
Katya, Redozubov's daughter, age 18
Chief of Police, age 45

ACT I

A stretch of meadowland by a river. Across the river, affectionately ringed round by green gardens, lies a small country town. Immediately in front of the audience there is a garden with apple and cherry trees, rowans and lindens. Under the trees stand a few beehives, a round table set in the ground, and rustic benches. Around the garden runs a battered wattle fence, on which hang a pair of felt boots, an old jacket, and a red shirt. Skirting the fence is the road from the river ferry to the mail-coach station. Inside the garden, at right, the corner of a little old house projects, with a stand against its wall where bread, ring-shaped rolls, sunflower seed, and home-brewed beer are sold. Left of center, just this side of the fence, stands a thatched building. The garden continues on left beyond it.

It is a hot summer afternoon.

A corn crake is heard from time to time, and plaintive notes of a pipe float in faintly from a distance. In the garden, IVAKIN, *with a bald head and a kind, clean-shaven face that looks rather comic, is sitting under the window of the house playing a guitar. By his side is* PAVLIN GOLOVASTIKOV, *a prim little old man, wearing a long Russian coat and a winter peaked cap. On the window stand a red jug with beer, and a few glass tankards. The young peasant* MATVEY *is sitting on the ground, by the fence, munching bread. From the right, the direction of the coach station, an ailing woman's listless voice can be heard calling:* "Yefim!" *There is no answer.* DUNKA'S HUSBAND *is coming down the road, left—a timid-looking man of indefinite age, in tattered clothes. The cry:* "Yefim!" *is repeated.*

IVAKIN. Hey! Yefim!

YEFIM (*enters, walking along the garden side of the fence*). I hear her. (*To* MATVEY.) What are you doing here?

MATVEY. Nothing. Just sitting.

For the third time the call of "Yefim!" *is heard, now in an angry tone.*

IVAKIN. Why don't you answer, my good man?

YEFIM. In a minute. (*To* MATVEY.) Get out of here!

Takes the red shirt off the fence. DUNKA'S HUSBAND *coughs and bows to him.*

Oh, it's you! What do you want?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. I've just come back from the monastery, Yefim Mitrich.

YEFIM (*moving off*). So they chucked you out? You dirty loafer!

IVAKIN (*to* YEFIM). You'd better go when you are called, my man. (*To* PAVLIN.) He certainly likes to order people about.

YEFIM *is on his way out.*

PAVLIN. Everybody likes that.

IVAKIN. But those ordered about—they don't like to be bawled out for nothing. They certainly don't.

PAVLIN. Well, whatever you do, no one is ever pleased. Still you have to be strict with everybody.

IVAKIN. You can play this waltz this way too. (*Plays.*)

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Ah, what a man! He bawled me out and what did I do?

MATVEY. It's hot!

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Yes, it's hot—but I don't talk about it—just bear it. What I mean is, a man who has enough to eat right away thinks he has power over others. Good appetite to you!

MATVEY. Thanks!

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. You come from the country? They certainly bake good bread in the villages.

MATVEY. They do all right when they have flour to do it with. I bought this here from Ivakin.

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Really? It smells like country bread. May I taste it?

MATVEY. I haven't got enough for myself—

DUNKA'S HUSBAND *sighs and silently licks his lips.*

IVAKIN. Then—you can play it slower still.

PAVLIN. You say it's called "The Waltz of the Mad Priest"?

IVAKIN. That's the name.

PAVLIN. But why such a name? I feel it's disrespectful to the priesthood and an invitation to sin.

IVAKIN. There you go! You're a terrible faultfinder, Pavlin.

PAVLIN. You are too hard on me. Everybody knows my heart is full of humility. It's only my mind that won't stay still.

IVAKIN. The trouble with you is that people don't like you.

PAVLIN. And why? Because I love truth above everything. Let other people wrong me. I don't complain. I am firm in my purpose, and want nothing but truth.

IVAKIN. What else is there for you to want? You have a house, some money— (*Voices are heard off left.* IVAKIN *looks in that direction.*) That's the postmaster's daughter. Where's she headed for?

PAVLIN. A wagtail—she'll end badly.

DROBYAZGIN *and* VESYOLKINA *walk on.*

VESYOLKINA. I tell you—she was married to an engineer.

DROBYAZGIN (*almost with despair*). But this cynicism is completely out of line with your appearance! Please take my word for it—Lydia Pavlovna's husband was the manager of a licorice factory and she didn't leave him—he simply died, choked on a fish bone.

VESYOLKINA. She left him, I tell you.

DROBYAZGIN. Maria Ivanovna! We know everything at the Treasury office.

VESYOLKINA. At the post office we know more than you do. I tell you—he has embezzled money and is to be tried. And she's involved in the affair herself. There!

DROBYAZGIN. Lydia Pavlovna, you say? Oh, Maria Ivanovna—

VESYOLKINA. And for contradicting me, you will have to treat me to a glass of beer.

IVAKIN, *taking this as an order, rises and goes around the corner.* PAVLIN *picks up* IVAKIN'S *guitar, looks inside it, touches the strings.*

DROBYAZGIN. I'll be delighted. But I insist Lydia Pavlovna is a widow.

VESYOLKINA. Is she? Very well. You'll find out.

They walk off right.

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Listen, give me a little piece in God's name.

MATVEY. You're a funny one! Why didn't you say so before? You asked for a taste—as if anybody wants to taste bread!

IVAKIN *returns, putting a jug of beer and two glasses on the table, then stands looking into the distance.*

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. I was ashamed to ask for it. Thank you!

IVAKIN. Say, Pavlin, but the town is beautiful. Like a pan of fried eggs—isn't it?

PAVLIN. Wait till they build the railway. It will spoil everything.

IVAKIN. Spoil? How? Croaking like a raven again.

PAVLIN. By bringing in hordes of strangers.

VESYOLKINA *and* DROBYAZGIN *stroll on again. They seat themselves at the table, drink beer, and converse in low tones.* IVAKIN *and* PAVLIN *go off around the corner of the house.*

MATVEY. Where do you come from?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. I live in the town.

MATVEY. I thought townspeople had money. What's happened to you?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. I've lost mine. My wife, Dunka, ruined me. Dunka and my brother. At first she was all right—we got on fine together. She was a pretty girl and a lively one. Yes. Then she says, "This life is too dull." And she began to drink. And so did I.

MATVEY. You, too?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Yes. I too couldn't help it. After that she began to carry on with other men. I beat her again and again. She ran away. I had a daughter—and she ran away too when she turned fourteen. (*He pauses, sunk in thought.*)

DROBYAZGIN (*at the table—in a loud voice*). Now, I protest. Maria Ivanovna! That's not true! Nadezhda Polikarpovna and the Doctor are both persons with romantic ideas—

VESYOLKINA. Sh-sh! Not so loud!

MATVEY. Does she play around too?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Who?

MATVEY. Your daughter.

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. I don't know. I don't even know where she is. On top of everything else, somebody punched me in the chest right near the heart when I was drunk—now I'm sick and can't work. Nor am I good at anything.

MATVEY. You don't say. How do you manage to live?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. I do what I can—

DROBYAZGIN (*leaping to his feet*). Maria Ivanovna! It's extraordinary—even horrifying! You don't believe in anything pure and honest!

VESYOLKINA. Don't shout! You talk like a madman.

DROBYAZGIN. No. To believe that Lydia Pavlovna and the Chief of Police—

VESYOLKINA. Sit down—

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. The engineers are expected today.

MATVEY. To build the railway?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. That's right. Railways are built, but there's no place a man can go to.

MATVEY. There'll be work, eh? It'd be fine to be working!

PAVLIN *appears from around the house and proceeds toward the table.*

VESYOLKINA (*in a low voice*). Pavlin's coming . . .

DROBYAZGIN. Ah, venerable sage! What's the news?

PAVLIN. How do you do? The Mayor has just ferried across the river—he's coming here—

VESYOLKINA. He wants to meet the engineers—that's what. Imagine! And he's such a proud old man— *Enter* IVAKIN, *panting.*

DROBYAZGIN. Yes— Hot, Ivan Ivanovich, isn't it?

IVAKIN (*looking into the distance*). It is hot—

PAVLIN. It's impatience that raises your temperature. I'm not waiting for anybody, so I'm not hot—

IVAKIN. The Doctor and the revenue collector are coming.

VESYOLKINA (*taking up* PAVLIN'S *remark*). Are we waiting for anybody? I don't think so.

PAVLIN. I don't mean you. He's waiting for his nephew.

DROBYAZGIN. The student?

IVAKIN. That's right. And Pritykin is with them, too.

VESYOLKINA. This is getting interesting! The first student our town's ever had.

DROBYAZGIN. Now, Maria Ivanovna—you know he's not. The statistician who shot himself—

VESYOLKINA. He'd left the university—

PAVLIN. That's true. He was expelled for his political misconduct.

IVAKIN (*rather rudely*). And he shot himself because you informed on him. Devil knows why you had to do that. (*He walks away.*)

PAVLIN (*after him*). I will always oppose evil— A man of harsh character is our friend Ivakin—and not too fair, either. I know for certain that Mr. Rybin, the statistician, shot himself because of the hopelessness of his love for Nadezhda Polikarpovna—

DROBYAZGIN. How do you know all that?

PAVLIN. Because I am observant—

Coming along the road, left, are the DOCTOR, MONAKHOV, *and* PRITYKIN. DUNKA'S HUSBAND *quietly disappears.* MATVEY *rises and bows.*

PRITYKIN. You will forgive me, Doctor, but I cannot understand the pleasure you find in fishing.

DOCTOR (*sullenly*). The fish are silent.

MONAKHOV (*to* PRITYKIN). What do you understand, anyway? I should say very little. Swimming in summer, steaming in a hot bath in winter—that's about all you know in the way of spiritual pleasure—

PAVLIN *moves toward the house and finds a seat for himself near the fence.*

PRITYKIN. The human body likes cleanliness—

DROBYAZGIN (*in a loud voice*). We're here ahead of you!

DOCTOR (*stopping at the fence*). Order some beer, Drobyazgin.

DROBYAZGIN (*shouts*). Ivakin! Bring beer—lots of it—and see that it's cold!

PRITYKIN. It's also a pleasure to win at cards—

MONAKHOV. No doubt—

PRITYKIN. Or take music. When the trumpets start to play, I feel like a soldier marching.

DOCTOR (*to* MONAKHOV, *with a grim smile*). He's buttering you up—

DROBYAZGIN *walks over to the fence and stands listening. It is clear that he would like to join in the conversation, but is too slow to find an opening.* VESYOLKINA *moves farther back, gazes at the town, and hums a tune.*

PRITYKIN. What good will that do me? But I do say that Mavriky Osipovich has earned everlasting glory in our town by teaching the firemen to play music. Can anybody deny that?

MONAKHOV. Well, I did have to work hard with them. It was like training seals—

PRITYKIN. Now every time I see a samovar, Mavriky Osipovich, I think of you.

DOCTOR (*without smiling*). Does he resemble a samovar?

DROBYAZGIN *laughs.*

PRITYKIN. No! No! I mean to say that brass of every kind reminds me of you.

DOCTOR. He'll kill you with his praises—

PRITYKIN. I mean, your work in music—

MONAKHOV. What's making you sing so sweet, my friend?

IVAKIN *has brought beer and advances toward the fence.*

PRITYKIN. If I sing I do so like a lark, quite disinterestedly. As for the Doctor making fun of me, he has a sour disposition and doesn't like anybody, except fish.

MONAKHOV (*looking away into the distance*). Our ladies are evidently tired. They've hardly moved a step.

DROBYAZGIN. It's hardest on Tatyana Nikolayevna considering her age and how heavy she is—

IVAKIN. Please come in and have your beer—

DOCTOR. Well, I'm not going to walk all the way around— (*Steps over the fence.*)

MONAKHOV. As for Lydia Pavlovna, you can see she is not interested in our company—

DROBYAZGIN. She's a society woman—with a proud way of living—

PRITYKIN. She's a fine horsewoman—

MONAKHOV. Y-yes! She does know how to ride a horse—

PRITYKIN. There! We're talking about the pleasures of life, and forgot women. Now what is there more pleasant? Of course, I'm not speaking of my wife—

MONAKHOV (*laughing*). Come, Pritykin, let's drink our beer.

They come around the fence.

PRITYKIN. Well, well. It's quite late—time for the mail coach to be in. Now we'll see what these engineers are like—

MONAKHOV. Yes, it'll be interesting. I'm sure they must enjoy a good game of cards—

PRITYKIN. And a drink, I bet.

They pick up their glasses and drift away. DUNKA'S HUSBAND *appears.*

MATVEY. Have they come here to meet the engineer?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Well, they've been in the next village at the fair. But of course, when important people come, everybody wants to know them—

Enter from the right LYDIA PAVLOVNA, *wearing a riding habit and carrying a whip.*

LYDIA PAVLOVNA. Here—will one of you hold my horse, please? I'll pay you—

MATVEY. All right, lady.

LYDIA PAVLOVNA. Thank you! (*She goes off right.*)

MATVEY. Well, what do you know!

DUNKA'S HUSBAND (*evincing envy and irritability*). If you weren't here, I would be looking after the horse—damn it! If she gives you a lot, you give me something, even if it's only five kopecks, will you?

MATVEY. Perhaps that'll be all she'll give me.

They both follow LYDIA PAVLOVNA *off right. Meanwhile, in the*

garden, the DOCTOR *and* VESYOLKINA *have been carrying on a conversation.*

DOCTOR (*sullenly*). People create while they are young.

PAVLIN (*who has been sitting silent all this time, rising*). Permit me to say the Fathers of the Church created even in old age—

DOCTOR. Well?

PAVLIN. That's all.

Coming into view on the road are PELAGEYA PRITYKINA, *and* NADEZHDA MONAKHOVA, *the latter a tall woman of great beauty with enormous staring eyes.* TATYANA BOGAYEVSKAYA *is directly behind them.*

NADEZHDA. Then he says to her: Alice! My love will not wane before I die, and as long as I live I am yours.

PELAGEYA PRITYKINA. Wonderful! Our men don't even know such words.

NADEZHDA (*sitting down on a log*). The Frenchman is unfaithful, but he loves passionately and nobly. The Spaniard grows quite wild in his love, and the Italian always plays the guitar under the window of his beloved.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. It was a mistake, Nadezhda, that you were ever taught to read.

NADEZHDA. You've reached an age, Tatyana Nikolayevna, where you are no longer interested in all this. But I—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. And you only wag your tongue—

NADEZHDA (*in a serious tone*). What I want to say—

PELAGEYA PRITYKINA. I envy you, my dear. You know so many love stories and they are all so wonderful—like a girl's dreams. Where's my Arkhip?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. I seem to recognize Lydia's mare over there—

NADEZHDA. Introduce me to her—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. To the mare?

NADEZHDA. No, to Lydia Pavlovna.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. There, my good woman—you've read a thousand novels, but you can't put a simple question correctly—only make yourself ridiculous.

NADEZHDA. It doesn't matter. Everyone is clever in his own way.

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*shouting, as she goes off right*). Lydia!

PELAGEYA PRITYKINA (*in a low voice*). My! My! She is rude to you—

NADEZHDA (*calmly*). The gentlefolk always talk like that to us commoners. Even in novels where everything is pictured better than it is in life, the gentry are arrogant. Look, isn't she beautiful?

BOGAYEVSKAYA *returns with* LYDIA.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Lydia dear, Nadezhda Polikarpovna wants to be introduced to you— (NADEZHDA *curtsies.*) She even knows how to curtsy.

The DOCTOR *walks up toward the fence; the women are still outside.*

NADEZHDA. I know you. Every day you ride past our house on your horse. I watch you admiringly—you look like a countess or a marquise. It's very beautiful.

LYDIA. I often see your face at the window, and I also admire you—

NADEZHDA. Thank you. It is pleasant to hear praises of one's beauty even from another woman—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Not at all shy, is she?

DOCTOR (*sullenly*). Is it pleasanter to be praised by a man than a woman?

NADEZHDA. Of course, only a man can appreciate your beauty fully.

LYDIA. You say it—with such assurance—

PRITYKIN (*shouts, off*). They're coming! Listen. Hear the bells?

Everybody listens. Coach bells are heard.

NADEZHDA (*to* LYDIA). Are you curious to see what they are like?

LYDIA. Who? It's time we went home, Auntie.

NADEZHDA. The engineers—

PRITYKIN (*rushing on*). They'll be here in a moment—

LYDIA (*to* NADEZHDA). No, I am not curious.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Wait a while, dear. I'm very tired.

NADEZHDA. I have been waiting for their arrival as for a holiday.

PELAGEYA PRITYKINA. What if they are old men!

LYDIA (*in a low voice, to her aunt*). This looks too much like an official welcoming party, a bit absurd—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Let's go into the garden—I want a drink of something. Come on!

All start after her.

PRITYKIN. So they've arrived, Doctor. Interesting, isn't it?

DOCTOR (*in his usual truculent manner*). Why? If they came by foot, there might be something to it. But by mail coach—

NADEZHDA. Such foolish talk!

BOGAYEVSKAYA. She'd like to see them on horseback, clad in armor, or with cloaks and swords—

They all go out, right. Enter from the same direction, walking slowly, his hands behind his back, MAYOR REDOZUBOV, *a stern-looking old man with a gray beard and black beetling eyebrows. He stops and listens to the noise drifting from the station.* PAVLIN *appears, taking off his peaked cap long before he reaches* REDOZUBOV.

REDOZUBOV. Hello— Well?

PAVLIN. I trust you are in good health?

REDOZUBOV. Ask my doctor. Have they come?

PAVLIN. They have—those engineers everybody has been waiting for. One is well up in years, close shaven except for a mustache, and seems to be a little oiled. The other is younger, and notably red haired. They have a lady with them—she's young and beautiful—and with

the lady is her maid—all prinked up. They came in two coaches. Their baggage and that student-nephew of Ivakin's came in the third—

REDOZUBOV. How did he happen to be with them?

PAVLIN. Evidently allowed to tag along out of kindness, on account of his poor financial condition—

REDOZUBOV. Is that Lydia Bogayevskaya's horse?

PAVLIN. That's right. The lady rode to Fokino for the fair and is now at Darya Ivakina's putting herself in order—Darya, of course, was their housemaid for many years—and her mother too was their housekeeper—

REDOZUBOV (*with a sarcastic snicker*). Know anything about her grandma?

PAVLIN. No, that I can't recall. PRITYKIN *bustles on.*

PRITYKIN. My best regards, Vassily Ivanovich—

REDOZUBOV (*without shaking hands*). Hello—

PRITYKIN. Have you come to welcome the new visitors?

REDOZUBOV. What good will they do me?

PRITYKIN. Some, in a general way. They will do good to the town.

REDOZUBOV (*starting off toward the station*). Then let the town welcome them.

PRITYKIN (*in a low voice*). Is he just acting?

PAVLIN. Positively. He's hoping to get a contract for railway ties.

PRITYKIN. The old devil. Now, Pavlin, I want you to get to know their servants and find out what's what—you know what I mean—

PAVLIN. I know—I know—

They both exit toward the station. From the same direction enter IVAKIN, *visibly pleased, and his nephew,* STEPAN LUKIN.

STEPAN. Well, how goes it?

IVAKIN. I am well, as you can see. What else does one need? But you look sallow, my boy. You rascal—why did you get yourself in jail?

STEPAN. It's obligatory. A sort of universal service today, like conscription. But it's not worth talking about, so let's not discuss it again, brother— Agreed?

IVAKIN. Brother! I like that— I'm your uncle, may I remind you!

STEPAN. Fiddlesticks! You're no uncle. You're just a childhood friend. Besides, I have some trace of a beard and mane, and look at yourself—as smooth as a baby—

IVAKIN. Steady there! Drink your beer, but respect your elders! (PRITYKIN *rushes on and looks about.*) What is it, Arkhip Fomich?

PRITYKIN. Well— Hey, boy, come here!

MATVEY (*appearing from right*). Yes.

PRITYKIN. You know me, don't you? Run over to my house in town and tell them to send the two carriages and the wagon down to the ferry for the baggage. Did you get that? Hurry up now! (PRITYKIN *runs back to the station.*)

MATVEY (*hurrying away*). Keep your eye on the horse, friend, will you?

IVAKIN. Things are beginning to hum in the town of Verkhopolye!

STEPAN. What's happened to the bridge?

IVAKIN. We've had some heavy rains, and it's been washed away. The Mayor is in no hurry to repair it—he runs the ferry. Do you know these engineers?

STEPAN. I'm going to work for them. How is everything—your bees—your guitar—your fishing tackle?

IVAKIN. Everything is fine.

Enter the DOCTOR, MONAKHOV, DROBYAZGIN, *and* VESYOLKINA *in conversation.* IVAKIN *and* STEPAN *go off.* PAVLIN *appears, looks about, and withdraws to reappear during the colloquy between* TSYGANOV *and* DUNKA'S HUSBAND.

MONAKHOV (*with envy*). That rascal Pritykin. Didn't waste any time making himself known to them—

VESYOLKINA. Did you notice, Doctor, the younger one looked like a torch?

DOCTOR. Where on earth have you ever seen torches?

VESYOLKINA. Why, Doctor, I've seen them at funerals. Remember the funeral of Prince Khryaschevaty?

DROBYAZGIN. What wonderful eyes she has! Did you notice, Mavriky Osipovich?

VESYOLKINA. Nonsense! She has very ordinary eyes.

DROBYAZGIN. I don't agree. They are extraordinarily poetic—

MONAKHOV. It's impolite to talk of the beauty of one lady in the presence of another. You ought to know that.

DOCTOR. Disgusting. Everybody has fallen on them like autumn flies on a fire.

PRITYKIN (*shouting off stage*). Doctor! Will you come over here please!

DOCTOR. What for?

PRITYKIN (*off stage*). You're needed—professionally.

DOCTOR (*leaving*). Oh, bother!

MONAKHOV (*enviously, to the* DOCTOR *as he goes*). Now you'll meet them—

VESYOLKINA *follows the* DOCTOR. *She runs into* TSYGANOV, *fashionably dressed, aristocratic looking, a little under the influence of drink. Embarrassed,* VESYOLKINA *turns from him sharply and continues on her way.* TSYGANOV *lifts his eyebrows in surprise.* DROBYAZGIN *takes off his hat to him.*

TSYGANOV (*touching his hat in response*). How do you do? To whom have I the honor of speaking?

DROBYAZGIN (*embarrassed*). Porphiry— That is, an official at the Treasury, Porphiry Drobyazgin.

TSYGANOV. Ah! Delighted! Tell me, is there a hotel in this town?

DROBYAZGIN. A very fine one—with a billiard room. We also have an intermediate school—for girls.

TSYGANOV. An intermediate school? Thank you, I won't be needing that immediately. Have you any cabs?

DROBYAZGIN. We have three cabs. They stand at the church.

TSYGANOV (*glancing over at the town*). I suppose they won't hear me if I call?

DROBYAZGIN (*smiling*). No—it's quite a distance.

DUNKA'S HUSBAND (*appears from the left*). Help a poor sick man, Your Honor!

TSYGANOV (*handing him a coin*). Here you are!

DUNKA'S HUSBAND (*starting with joy*). Thank you, sir. God bless you. (*Quickly disappears.*)

TSYGANOV. Does he drink?

DROBYAZGIN. No. He's really a poor sick man. Also his wife deserted him.

MONAKHOV (*crossing over*). I take the liberty—

TSYGANOV. Not at all—

MONAKHOV. Mavriky Osipovich Monakhov. I am the revenue collector—

TSYGANOV. Much honored, to be sure. I am Sergey Nikolayevich Tsyganov.

MONAKHOV. The hotel, allow me to tell you, is filthy and full of bugs—

DROBYAZGIN. That's true. Full of them.

MONAKHOV. You must stay in Bogayevskaya's house—the best house in town—a house for people of quality, you know. I believe she's right here now. I'll fix it for you.

MONAKHOV *walks off quickly. He passes* ANNA FYODOROVNA *and her maid* STYOPA *on the way.*

TSYGANOV. It's very kind of you— But I don't know, really— Now, wait a minute—

DROBYAZGIN (*darting off*). I'll bring him back.

TSYGANOV. No, no! You can't do that! Well, it's too late!

ANNA. What's happened?

TSYGANOV. They're too considerate here—like real savages. And I can congratulate you—there are no hotels in town—or rather there is a hotel but it's been taken over by the bugs.

ANNA. And it's no easy thing to get to the town either—something has happened to the ferryboat.

TSYGANOV (*beckoning with his finger*). Come over here, please, will you? (DUNKA'S HUSBAND *appears.*) Tell me, my good fellow, have you anything—remarkable in your town?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. We have crawfish—great big ones!

STYOPA *looks intently at* DUNKA'S HUSBAND.

TSYGANOV. That may be quite nice—on occasion. But they probably live in the river, not in the town—don't they?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Oh, yes—they live in the river. They are live crawfish when in water.

STYOPA (*in a low voice*). Anna Fyodorovna! There he is—

ANNA. Who?

STYOPA. My father. What am I to do?

TSYGANOV. Well, well— But what have you in the town?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. We have firemen who play trumpets— The revenue collector has taught them—

ANNA. Quiet. Stand behind me.

TSYGANOV. Do they make much noise?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. They blow with all they've got!

STYOPA. I'll go back to the station. He hasn't seen me.

TSYGANOV. The prospects don't seem to be very cheerful. Well, thank you. Take this.

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Your Honor— (*Tries to kiss* TSYGANOV'S *hand.*)

TSYGANOV (*disdainfully*). That's quite unnecessary, my friend— Run along—

STYOPA (*looking after her father*). A beggar—I told you I'd meet him. I knew I shouldn't come here. Didn't I tell you that?

ANNA. Calm yourself. I'll see he doesn't bother you.

STYOPA. I'm afraid of him. He made a hell of my mother's life. The beggar!

TSYGANOV. What's the trouble, if I may ask?

ANNA. That was her father—

TSYGANOV. Oh! That's neat.

ANNA. Is that all? You go to the station, Styopa.

TSYGANOV. We won't let anybody harm you.

CHERKUN (*shouting off stage*). Anna! Come here, Anna!

TSYGANOV (*looks in the direction of the voice*). Who's he talking to? Why—I'll be damned! I can't believe it!

ANNA (*to* TSYGANOV *as she moves off toward* CHERKUN). What's the matter with you?

TSYGANOV (*stretching out his hands, with an expression of joy*). Lydia Pavlovna! Is it you—really you?

LYDIA (*coming on*). Good old Serge!

TSYGANOV. You! On this Tierra del Fuego, among savages! How on earth?

VESYOLKINA *has returned to the garden. She strolls about, fanning herself with some flowers. Soon* DROBYAZGIN *joins her, and they walk together, straining to hear the conversation.*

LYDIA. I've come to stay with my aunt. Well, I'm happy to see you! I notice you're just as fond of ladies as ever.

TSYGANOV. Also, I'm out of luck. The first person I meet in this land is a revenue collector!

LYDIA (*nodding in the direction of* ANNA, *who is off stage*). Is the lady your wife?

TSYGANOV. My wife? I've never encumbered myself with possessions and never will. But where is your worthy husband?

LYDIA. I'm sure I don't know. His whereabouts are no concern of mine.

TSYGANOV. Do I understand you correctly? Bravo! You've separated at last. You have?

VESYOLKINA (*referring to* TSYGANOV's *remark*). Well? Didn't I tell you? DROBYAZGIN *looks embarrassed.*

LYDIA. Don't shout—

TSYGANOV. Have you met my colleague? George! Come here! There's a man for you! Flaming red and terribly impertinent.

Enter CHERKUN.

Do you know who this is, George? You remember I often spoke to you about a lady—

CHERKUN (*shaking hands with* LYDIA). Yes, I remember. He did speak of you often—

LYDIA. I'm touched—

CHERKUN. But I never expected to meet you, especially in this land of mortal gloom.

LYDIA. Don't you like the town?

CHERKUN. I don't like pastorals.

TSYGANOV. He only likes violent excitement.

NADEZHDA MONAKHOVA *appears in the garden. She stands gazing at* CHERKUN, *motionless as a statue, her face like stone.*

CHERKUN. Little houses hiding in the trees like birds' nests. It's quiet to the point of anguish, and charming to the point of nausea. My fingers itch to muss up this idyl.

TSYGANOV. Introduce Lydia Pavlovna to your wife.

CHERKUN. Oh, yes. May I?

LYDIA. I shall be delighted. But how hard you are on this poor little town—

TSYGANOV. I'm sure after this you'll appreciate the gentleness of my heart as well as my other good qualities.

CHERKUN. When I see a thing I either like it or dislike it—

TSYGANOV. This fellow has no good qualities at all.

LYDIA. A man who has only bad qualities is at least something definite.

TSYGANOV (*noticing* NADEZHDA). H'm! But George, introduce Lydia Pavlovna to your wife—

CHERKUN. Now Anna, I'm sure, likes this charming scene. She loves rest and quiet—she adores dreaming.

LYDIA. Many people find poetry in that—

CHERKUN. Yes, all cowards, idlers, and anemic weaklings.

TSYGANOV. Who is that matronly lady coming with your wife?

LYDIA. That's my aunt. ANNA *and* BOGAYEVSKAYA *enter.*

CHERKUN. Anna, meet Lydia Pavlovna Bogayevskaya.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Our guests have just rented the first floor of my big house, Lydia.

ANNA. I'm awfully glad everything has been arranged so quickly and so well.

TSYGANOV. Three cheers for the revenue collector! You have him to thank.

LYDIA. Not so loud. There's his wife.

TSYGANOV. Is that his wife? H'm! (*Regards* NADEZHDA.)

ANNA. I'm so tired—I'll be glad to get into a house.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. The ferry will be over shortly.

NADEZHDA *walks off slowly.*

CHERKUN. And on the other side that merchant—what's his name? —already has horses waiting for us.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Pritykin is the fellow's name. I'll cross on a skiff, Lydia. I have to give some orders—make the place ready for them—

ANNA. Please, don't trouble yourself—

CHERKUN. We're not so helpless as all that.

LYDIA (*to her aunt*). Wait. (*To* ANNA.) Do you ride a horse?

ANNA. No, I don't.

LYDIA. It's a pity. I thought I'd offer you mine. There's a ford farther up the river.

ANNA. Thank you, I'm afraid of horses. Once I saw a horse kill a little boy. Ever since I've had the feeling that every horse is waiting for a chance to kill.

LYDIA (*smiling*). But you're not afraid of driving in carriages, are you?

ANNA. No, not so much. There I have a coachman between me and the horse.

CHERKUN. This may be very touching, Anna, but I assure you it's not clever.

ANNA. I'm not trying to be clever.

TSYGANOV (*to* LYDIA). So we meet again!

CHERKUN (*continuing, to* ANNA). It wouldn't be a bad idea if you did try once in a while!

TSYGANOV. You know it's almost a miracle.

LYDIA. Or maybe it only proves that the world is too small.

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*to* ANNA). Come and look at our little town. It's quite wonderful really. (*Leads* ANNA *to the fence.*)

TSYGANOV. You look more beautiful than ever. And there is a new expression in your eyes.

LYDIA. Probably boredom.

CHERKUN. Are you bored?

LYDIA. I don't think life is too gay.

REDOZUBOV *enters, having come from the station. He approaches*

the group, coughs, but nobody pays any attention. He raises his hand to his peaked cap, as if saluting, but quickly drops it, afraid that his movement was noticed.

CHERKUN. I didn't expect that from you—

LYDIA. Why not?

CHERKUN. I don't know. But I thought you would have a different view of life.

LYDIA. What is life? Life is people. I've seen a great many of them—and they're all too much alike.

REDOZUBOV. I'm the local Mayor—Vassily Ivanovich Redozubov—the Mayor—

CHERKUN (*coldly*). What can we do for you?

REDOZUBOV. I want to speak to the chief. Are you the chief?

TSYGANOV. We are both chiefs—believe it or not.

REDOZUBOV. Well, then. Will you need lumber for railway ties?

CHERKUN (*dryly*). I'll be ready to talk business in a week's time, my good man—not before. *Pause.*

REDOZUBOV (*surprised*). Perhaps you didn't hear?

CHERKUN. Hear what?

REDOZUBOV. I said I was—the Mayor—the head of the town.

CHERKUN. I heard you. Well?

REDOZUBOV (*restraining his anger*). I am sixty-three years old. I am the churchwarden, and the whole town takes orders from me—

CHERKUN. What makes you think I have to know all that?

TSYGANOV. Sir, when we recover our senses a little, we will not fail to pay due attention to all your rare qualifications—

CHERKUN. For the present, you'd better leave us alone. We'll call you when we need you.

His eyes flashing anger, REDOZUBOV *looks the two up and down and strides off.*

ANNA. Why were you rude to him, Yegor? He's an old man—

CHERKUN. I know these pushy fellows. Head of the town, is it? Not a head so much as a stupid greedy mouth. I know the type.

TSYGANOV (*to* LYDIA). How do you like this redthatched ruffian?

LYDIA. To be quite frank, not very much.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. We must go now, Lydia.

ANNA. My husband is always a little rough. But at heart—

CHERKUN. He's kind and soft—is that what you wanted to say? Don't believe her. I'm exactly what I appear to be.

LYDIA. Good-by. Oh! That man doesn't know how to treat a horse—(*Goes quickly off right, followed by* BOGAYEVSKAYA.)

BOGAYEVSKAYA. We'll be waiting for you—

TSYGANOV. Thanks a lot. We shan't be long.

ANNA. By the way, where's that student of ours?

CHERKUN (*looking at the town*). I don't know.

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ANNA. Do you think we could ask him to watch our things? We can't leave Styopa here.

CHERKUN. He's not a servant.

TSYGANOV. You look upon this town, George, as Attila did Rome. How the mighty have fallen!

CHERKUN. A hideous little town— Has that woman had lovers?

TSYGANOV. What a question to ask!

ANNA. Shame, Yegor!

CHERKUN. You are shocked? You don't know that many women have lovers?

ANNA. Such things aren't talked about like that.

CHERKUN. Not by other people—no. They are talked about by me. You think it's immoral?

ANNA. It's vulgar—and rude.

CHERKUN. Oh, I thought you meant immoral. Well, did she have lovers, Sergey?

TSYGANOV. I don't know, my friend. But I don't think it likely. And I wouldn't believe it even if someone told me.

Enter PRITYKIN *and* DUNKA'S HUSBAND.

PRITYKIN. Everything is ready, please. All your baggage has been carried to the ferry. Will you come, please?

TSYGANOV. Thank you. I'm afraid we've given you a lot of trouble.

PRITYKIN. Not at all! Not at all! It's not worth mentioning. Besides, it's our duty to be hospitable.

TSYGANOV. You're a wonderful man, upon my honor. Tell me, what do you drink here?

PRITYKIN. Everything.

TSYGANOV. But what do you like best?

PRITYKIN. Vodka.

TSYGANOV. A coarse taste, but a healthy one. *They walk off.*

CHERKUN (*to* ANNA). Let's go.

ANNA (*taking his arm*). What's made you so glum suddenly, Yegor?

CHERKUN. I'm tired.

ANNA. That's not true. You're never tired.

CHERKUN. Then I've fallen in love.

ANNA (*in a low voice*). Why are you so rough, Yegor? Why?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND (*coming over*). Your Excellency!

CHERKUN. Get away—

ANNA (*handing him a coin*). Here— CHERKUN *and* ANNA *go off.*

MATVEY (*jumping out from behind the house*). How much did she give you?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Twenty kopecks. I've made a ruble twenty altogether.

MATVEY. You're a lucky one! All I've made is ten kopecks.

PRITYKIN (*shouting off stage*). Hey there!

MATVEY. I'm coming—

He runs off. PAVLIN *climbs over the fence.*

PAVLIN. You made a ruble twenty, you say?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND (*timidly*). A ruble twenty.

PAVLIN. Let me see. Y-yes. It's true. And for what, I ask you? Take it, you tramp, and get out of here! Just a second. There's one thing I'd like to tell you. Want to hear it?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. I've done nothing, Pavlin Savelyevich—

REDOZUBOV *returns.*

PAVLIN. Move on! Move on! Don't hang around here.

DUNKA'S HUSBAND *leaves.*

REDOZUBOV. Have they gone?

PAVLIN. Yes.

REDOZUBOV. What were you talking to that maid about?

PAVLIN. Oh, just this and that—but I couldn't get anything out of her. I even gave her a ruble.

REDOZUBOV. Why did you do that? Now she can say you tried to bribe her—

PAVLIN. I only did it in my mind. I said to myself. What if I give her a ruble? I decided that it wouldn't help. She's a spoiled young woman— REDOZUBOV *gazes at the town without listening.* Vassily Ivanovich! She's the daughter of Dunka's Husband—ran away from him. She told me so herself—

REDOZUBOV (*suddenly, in a stern voice*). Do you know that the governor himself shakes hands with me?

PAVLIN (*reverentially*). I certainly do. Everybody knows that.

Pause. STEPAN LUKIN'S *voice is heard through the window.*

REDOZUBOV (*in a low voice*). Who is that speaking?

PAVLIN (*whispers*). Ivakin's nephew—the student—

REDOZUBOV (*whispers*). Quiet—

They listen. In the distance a dog is howling, a corn crake sounds its note.

STEPAN (*off stage*). Wait till we build the new railway—we'll put an end to your old way of life— (*He laughs.*)

REDOZUBOV (*in a low voice*). Did you hear that?

PAVLIN (*with conviction*). It's a lie—

REDOZUBOV. Well, remember his words!

He goes off, PAVLIN *following him.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

The garden of TATYANA BOGAYEVSKAYA'S *house. A large canvas is stretched high among the trees. Under it stands a plain unpainted*

table of good size. To the left is the house with a broad path leading up to it. A fence, upstage, shuts in the garden.
At the table, CHERKUN *is working. He has a pile of papers, maps, and drawings in front of him. Under the trees, left,* ANNA *sits in a wicker chair with a book in her hands.*

ANNA (*stretching herself*). Do you feel hot?

CHERKUN. How else?

ANNA. Sergey Nikolayevich is still gone. You always do most of the work, and you're always on the same jobs together. Why?

CHERKUN (*without raising his head*). He has far more experience and knowledge than I have.

ANNA. But he is so—loose morally.

CHERKUN. Knowledge is of greater value than morals— *Pause.*

ANNA. Everybody is so inquisitive here—eavesdropping, watching us— They're terribly naïve.

CHERKUN. Idiots—that's all they are.

ANNA. This very instant there's somebody moving behind the fence in the next garden and looking through the crack. I can see two glittering eyes.

CHERKUN. Let them glitter—I don't give a damn.

STEPAN LUKIN (*entering*). Well, I've hired that fellow Matvey. Here are his papers.

ANNA. I'll take them.

CHERKUN. No, don't give them to her. She'll put them away and afterward ask me where. That's not very amusing.

STEPAN. I must say the people here are extraordinary. They belong in a museum. You begin to doubt the future of Russia when you see them. And when you think of the thousands of villages and towns filled with such people, you just get carried away by gloom—hundred horsepower pessimism.

CHERKUN. For a working man pessimism is a luxury, like white gloves. What sort of fellow is this Matvey?

STEPAN. He's not too stupid, I think. There he is. Do you want me to stay?

Enter MATVEY, *his clothes looking cleaner than in the first act.*

CHERKUN. No. (*To* MATVEY, *as* STEPAN *exits*). Well, what's on your mind?

MATVEY. I want to thank you for giving me the job, sir!

CHERKUN. I am no sir. I am a peasant like yourself, and my name is Yegor Petrovich. We have nothing to thank each other for. You will work, and I'll pay you for it. But if you try any monkey business, I'll fire you and take you to court—is that clear?

MATVEY. Yes, it's clear. I'll do my best for you—

CHERKUN. We'll see. You may go now.

MATVEY (*after a hesitant pause*). Thank you.

CHERKUN (*glancing at him*). Well, what is it?

MATVEY. Anything else?

CHERKUN. No, nothing. Go. *Silence while* MATVEY *departs.*

ANNA. You are too harsh with people, Yegor.

CHERKUN. That's how they were with me. *Pause.*

ANNA. Do you like Tatyana Nikolayevna?

CHERKUN. I like her niece better.

ANNA. You're determined to tease me.

CHERKUN. Don't let me. Protest.

The head of GRISHA REDOZUBOV *appears above the fence.*

ANNA (*a little frightened*). Look, look, Yegor!

CHERKUN (*surprised*). What do you want?

GRISHA (*smiling*). Nothing. I'm just—curious—

CHERKUN. Who are you?

GRISHA. I am your neighbor—Redozubov—

ANNA. What a friendly smile he has! Ask him to come over.

CHERKUN. Well, come over. Let's get acquainted.

GRISHA. I can't climb the fence. I'm too fat.

ANNA (*laughing*). You don't have to. You walk around, through the gate—

GRISHA. H'm—you mean through the street? All right.

GRISHA *disappears. Enter* TSYGANOV.

ANNA. Such a funny boy!

CHERKUN. Now you have something to amuse you—

TSYGANOV. I tried to get some sleep, but couldn't, damn it! These country flies are all over you. Bzz-bzz! Then bang into the window—then plump on your nose—tickling you—tickling—

CHERKUN. And on top of it, I suppose, a headache after last night—

TSYGANOV. Ah, yes! The little town welcomes the engineers. It could have gone off a lot better as far as I was concerned. What's the name of that concoction they drink?

CHERKUN. Pritykin calls it the elephant killer—

TSYGANOV. It's certainly potent stuff. Incidentally, George—I seem to feel a strange after-effect. Today I suddenly remembered that little brunette—what's her name? She was a chorus girl—then she jumped in the river—the Moika— You knew her, didn't you?

CHERKUN. No.

TSYGANOV (*pensively*). She was a tiny thing—pretty eyes. And a moment ago as I burned the wings off one of those flies, it reminded me of that girl—what's her name?

ANNA (*staring in the direction of the house*). Good heavens! Look! What's that?

TSYGANOV. Am I seeing things?

CHERKUN. Lord! The boy's crazy!

GRISHA (*in a heavy fur coat*). Here I am! Whew!

CHERKUN. You funny fellow—what's the idea?

GRISHA (*smiling*). You mean my fur coat? It's my father's idea. He makes me sweat so I'll grow thin and weak. I'm to join the army this fall, and he's steaming the flesh off me to keep me out.

TSYGANOV. Darn clever of him!

CHERKUN. And you let him make a fool of you?

GRISHA. You can't argue with my father. He's too quick with his fists. And who knows, perhaps they really won't take me into the army if I get sick—

CHERKUN. Now look—take off that fur coat. You're a disgusting sight. Aren't you ashamed? All the girls must be laughing at you. You're hideous. You've got to tell your father you refuse to wear a fur coat in hot weather.

GRISHA. You go and tell him—just try!

TSYGANOV. Now look, young man. Suppose your father suddenly gets the idea to seat himself astride your back and orders you to ride him through the streets on a public holiday. Will you do as he tells you?

GRISHA. He won't want me to do that. He's too proud to let people laugh at him.

CHERKUN. Take off your coat.

GRISHA (*removing it*). All right, I will—but I hope he doesn't see me like this—

ANNA. You are fond of him, aren't you?

GRISHA (*after a pause*). He's old—and will soon die, I expect. Then I shall be my own master.

CHERKUN. Go home and send him here.

GRISHA. Send whom? My father?

CHERKUN. Yes, of course. Isn't he at home?

GRISHA (*in confusion*). But how can I tell him such a thing? Send him! You can't do that to him. He's the leading citizen.

CHERKUN (*jumping to his feet*). Oh, hell! (*Walks toward the fence.*)

GRISHA (*in a frightened voice*). What are you going to do? What's he up to, ma'am? I'll go. I'll only get myself in dutch here. Gosh, he's a troublemaker!

CHERKUN. Don't let him go, Sergey. (*Shouts over the fence.*) Hey! Anybody there?

ANNA (*laughing*). Yegor! This is really unnecessary—

GRISHA. Ma'am, this is making mischief! I've been lured in here—and now— No, I must go. This is all wrong!

TSYGANOV. Buck up, young man. Just wait quietly. Sit down.

CHERKUN (*over the fence*). Is that you? Please, come over. When? Right now!

REDOZUBOV (*from behind the fence*). Grishka! Grishka!

GRISHA (*frightened*). He's calling me! Oh, my God!

CHERKUN. He's here, with me—

PELAGEYA PRITYKINA *enters the garden.*

TSYGANOV (*seeing* PRITYKINA). Here's another specimen of the local fauna coming over—

GRISHA. It's Pelageya Pritykina— Oh, my God!

TSYGANOV. You need a drink. It'll keep up your spirits.

GRISHA. Let me have one—quick! Oh, God! Oh, God!

ANNA (*laughing*). Now, come, come! You're such a—queer boy! Styopa!

PRITYKINA. Good afternoon!

TSYGANOV (*bowing*). Good afternoon! What is it you want?

PRITYKINA. Is Tatyana Nikolayevna at home?

TSYGANOV. That, I regret to say, is something I wouldn't know.

STYOPA *steps out of the house.*

PRITYKINA. Hello, Grisha!

GRISHA (*mumbles*). Now it has started—

CHERKUN. A lady is saying hello to you, and you remain seated—

ANNA (*calling to* STYOPA). Bring us some port wine and liqueur.

TSYGANOV (*as the girl starts back in*). Also cognac and vodka—

GRISHA. I know her—

PRITYKINA (*to* CHERKUN). We certainly know each other. And the lady—is she your wife? What a beauty she is—

CHERKUN. She can't give you any information about Tatyana Nikolayevna either—

STYOPA *brings out several bottles on a tray.*

PRITYKINA. It doesn't matter very much really. To tell the truth I've come to see you, not her—I can see her any time, but it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance.

CHERKUN. I think this lady wants to see you, Anna.

TSYGANOV. I'm sure she means you— Well, young man, which will you have?

GRISHA. The one that's got the most kick to it—

PRITYKINA. No, I mean all of you. Of course, the lady is interesting for her clothes, but you gentlemen are very interesting too.

GRISHA (*downing a glass of liqueur*). Whew! It's sweet, but it does take your breath away!

TSYGANOV (*bowing to* PRITYKINA). I'm flattered. Make a note of it young man—this liquid is called chartreuse—

ANNA (*to* PRITYKINA). Please, sit down—

PRITYKINA. Thank you. I've been saying to Arkhip, that's my husband, for a long time: Introduce me to the engineers, you wretch. And he frightens me: They are very reserved, says he. But you're not at all reserved, though of course you are educated and so naturally proud. Well, everybody likes to be proud. For instance, we are proud of money, you of education. When a man has neither, what is he? He's no better than a baby that dies after living barely a year—there's really nothing to be said about it. I once gave birth to a child like that—

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ANNA (*springing to her feet*). Perhaps you'll come with me to the veranda?

PRITYKINA. I will, my dear, with pleasure. You are so gentle, so warmhearted. I'm very glad you've come, very glad. Ours is a dear little town—so pretty. And all around—forests, fields, swamps—and lots and lots of cranberries.

TSYGANOV (*glancing at the retiring ladies*). It's quite entertaining, George. She's an interesting woman.

GRISHA (*bursting into laughter*). She's stupid!

CHERKUN. What?

GRISHA. She's stupid, I say. Marries a young man at her age! She was rich too. But he got everything she had into his hands, and, of course, runs after other women. He's a smart bird! Oh, Father's coming! I'll hide behind you—and I'd better have another drink—

TSYGANOV *screens* GRISHA *who meantime pours himself a full glass of liqueur and downs it, his eyes popping wildly with the shock. Enter* REDOZUBOV, *glowering at* CHERKUN. *Behind* REDOZUBOV *is* PAVLIN, *carrying a thick notebook under his arm.*

REDOZUBOV (*without so much as a nod to* CHERKUN). Grishka! What are you doing here?

GRISHA (*grinning*). Nothing—

CHERKUN. I invited him.

REDOZUBOV. What for?

CHERKUN. I wanted to speak to him.

REDOZUBOV. Did he ask my permission to come?

CHERKUN. Why should he? *They look at each other.*

REDOZUBOV. I am his father—

CHERKUN. Well, I have no time for long arguments. Your son musn't wear this ridiculous fur coat. It's idiocy!

REDOZUBOV (*startled*). What's that?

PAVLIN *cautiously moves away from* REDOZUBOV.

CHERKUN. But if he continues to wear it, I'll report to the military authorities that you're forcing your son to evade service in the army—is that clear?

GRISHA. I want to be in the army, Father—honest I do.

CHERKUN. Is that clear, I say? It's a criminal act—

REDOZUBOV (*confused*). Wait—what right have you? Pavlin, you're a witness—go home, Grishka—

GRISHA. Father—I can't lose weight—I just can't—

Enter PRITYKIN. *He lingers, left, behind the trees.*

REDOZUBOV (*in a calmer tone*). You've come to build the railway, mister. All right, build it. I don't interfere with you, and you'd better not interfere with the affairs of other people. And don't stick your green eyes out at me. Get out of here, Grishka. I'll complain about this—I'll go to the governor—

TSYGANOV. And find yourself in front of a judge. What a place for

a man of sixty, the Mayor of the city, the churchwarden, the relative of the fire chief, and so on and so forth. Such a brilliant career, and such a sad ending. Just picture it yourself—

REDOZUBOV. Go home, Grishka, you good-for-nothing! Don't listen to them—don't even look at them!

GRISHA (*drunk, crying*). They'll throw you in jail! And me, too!

REDOZUBOV (*grabs his arm*). Come on, you pup— (*He walks out quickly, dragging* GRISHA.)

CHERKUN (*speaking after them, calmly*). If you beat your son, mister, it will cost you a pretty penny— (*Follows them off.*)

PRITYKIN (*surprised*). He got scared! Vassily Ivanovich Redozubov got scared!

TSYGANOV. The fellow likes everybody to bow and scrape, doesn't he?

PRITYKIN. I should say he does. He sees a man being buried with due honors, and he's so jealous it's all he can do not to push him out of the coffin and hop in himself. Have you seen the stone pillars outside his house? He's blocked the street with them. He wanted to build a grand entrance, like Prince Khryaschevaty's, but the authorities ordered him to stop obstructing the street. He went to court, and the case is still there, for the seventh year—he refuses to give in. And he'll never give in to anybody.

PAVLIN (*comes forward and recites, counting on his fingers*). A harsh man, if I may speak. He drove one wife to her grave, the other ran away to a convent; one of his sons is daft, the other's missing.

TSYGANOV. Pardon me, but who are you?

PAVLIN. Me? Everybody knows me here—

STYOPA *returns, clears the bottles from the table, and carries them off.*

PRITYKIN. A friend of Redozubov's—and a nut.

PAVLIN. I like to be friends with everybody—

TSYGANOV. What can I do for you?

PAVLIN. Here's something I've written. Since you are a learned man, I would like to know your opinion and should be obliged to hear it from you. The work is called "A discourse upon certain words written by a disinterested lover of truth to expose falsehood." It took me nine years to write it—

TSYGANOV (*taking the notebook*). And what is it you discourse on in your work?

PAVLIN. I am against new words. Human acts have remained unchanged since ancient times, but they have been given new names. I object to this. In general, I am against new words.

TSYGANOV. What do you mean by new words?

PAVLIN. For example, in the old days the word was calumniator, today it's newspaper reporter—

PRITYKIN. He's getting at the dressing down he got in a newspaper

for informing on a teacher. You never objected to anything Mayor Redozubov did, did you?

PAVLIN. A bush cannot cover a tree with its shadow. He is a higher man in importance in the town than I am— You cannot reach the inaccessible—

TSYGANOV (*moving toward the house*). All right, I'll have a look at your manuscript—

PAVLIN. Thank you most sincerely—

TSYGANOV. Stop in one day—

PAVLIN. I will, without fail—

TSYGANOV, PAVLIN, and PRITYKIN ail go off. From behind REDOZUBOV'S *fence* KATYA'S *head appears, surveys the garden attentively.* CHERKUN'S *voice is heard.* KATYA *vanishes as* CHERKUN *and* ANNA *walk on.*

CHERKUN. They're vicious—

ANNA. If they are, it's because they are stupid—

CHERKUN. Now you're off on your favorite theme—

ANNA. You can be very depressing, Yegor.

CHERKUN. You're depressed? I'm only bored. (*Sits at the table.*) They're waiting for you—your guests.

ANNA. I'm going. You don't want to kiss me?

CHERKUN. No.

ANNA turns abruptly and walks off. CHERKUN *goes on with his work.* KATYA *again stands up behind the fence. She throws a stone at* CHERKUN, *follows it with a stick, then drops out of sight.*

CHERKUN (*in the direction of the fence*). Hey, you— Savage! I won't stand for such nonsense!

KATYA (*behind the fence*). I don't give a hoot what you do!

CHERKUN (*rising*). You're a woman?

KATYA. None of your business—carrot top!

CHERKUN. Even if you are a woman, it's rude and stupid to throw stones at people—

KATYA. But you think you have the right to hurt other people?

CHERKUN. What people?

KATYA. As if you didn't know— My father and brother—

CHERKUN. Oh, I see! All the same it's hardly honest to attack from behind a corner. Why don't you show yourself?

STEPAN LUKIN comes into the garden and watches CHERKUN *with an expression of surprise.*

KATYA. You think I'm afraid of you?

CHERKUN. That's one thing I could think. But more likely you don't show yourself because you're just too homely.

STEPAN. Who are you talking to, chief?

CHERKUN. A lady.

STEPAN (*looking about*). Where is she?

CHERKUN. Over there.

STEPAN. I'm mystified. The Chief of Police wants to see you.

CHERKUN. What for?

STEPAN. I don't know. I'm off to look at the lady.

KATYA. You just try!

CHERKUN (*heading for the house*). Watch your step. She throws sticks at men.

KATYA. Only at carrot tops.

STEPAN. Then you won't lay me out with a stick?

KATYA. Climb up and find out for yourself.

STEPAN. H'm! I'm scared. Well, I'll take a chance.

KATYA (*appearing at the fence*). No—stay where you are. If my father sees you, he'll give it to you good and proper. What do you want?

STEPAN. Nothing. And you?

KATYA. When the redhead comes back I'll hit him with a rock right on the nose—

STEPAN. Say! What did he do?

KATYA. I know what he did. Tell me, is the beautiful lady the lawful wife of the redhead?

STEPAN. Why do you want to know?

KATYA. Because I do. Does he love her?

STEPAN. You'd better ask him—or her—about that.

KATYA. As if you didn't know—

STEPAN. I have no experience in these matters—

KATYA. Storyteller! All students are dissolute; they don't believe in God either, and they read forbidden books! I know. Do you read forbidden books?

STEPAN. Alas! I do.

Enter TSYGANOV. *He stops and listens smilingly.*

KATYA. Shame on you! Why do you do it?

STEPAN. Just a habit, you know—

KATYA (*in a low voice*). Lend me one that has a little stuff to it—will you? I'm very fond of reading. Oh!

Disappears. STEPAN *glances around.*

TSYGANOV. Congratulations, young man.

STEPAN (*embarrassed*). You with your conclusions! What happened? Nothing. She just asked me for some books. Even if she did it over the fence—what of it?

TSYGANOV. I'm not saying anything—

STEPAN. Yes—but you smile—

TSYGANOV. Well, I can see you're not in love yet. You're still talking straight.

STEPAN. There you are—love! Why love?

TSYGANOV. I often used to ask myself this very question— Why love? But it didn't help me, young man, and I fell in love just the

same. Well, she's very pretty, you know—a darling little she-devil with tousled hair. I wish you success.

He picks up some maps from the table and leaves. STEPAN *looks at the fence and begins to climb it. Enter* TATYANA BOGAYEVSKAYA *and* NADEZHDA MONAKHOVA.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. What are you climbing the fence for, young man?

STEPAN. I want to get my cap. I hung it on top and it fell over.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. But your cap is on your head—

STEPAN. Oh, this isn't the one I lost. It was another one.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. If you ask me, you've lost your head, not your cap. Nadezhda Polikarpovna, meet Stepan Danilovich Lukin—

NADEZHDA (*regarding* STEPAN *intently*). A likable young man—

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*lighting a cigarette*). Well, let's leave him to his fence climbing. The others are coming. Oh, Nadezhda, if you would only speak less—people might think you were more intelligent.

STYOPA *emerges from the house carrying a basket loaded with plates, bottles of lemonade, and liqueur. She removes the papers from the table and is spreading a cloth over it as the* DOCTOR, TSYGANOV, *and* ANNA *stroll on.*

NADEZHDA (*calmly*). I am very intelligent.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Nonsense. You should think— What other subjects can you talk about besides love?

NADEZHDA. None—

TSYGANOV (*to the* DOCTOR). First we'll have a drink, Doctor!

DOCTOR. Afterward, too.

TSYGANOV. That goes without saying. Did you bring everything, Styopa? Here it is—

Busies himself with a bottle. The DOCTOR *regards* NADEZHDA *with a heavy fixed stare.* ANNA *comes over and sits down beside her.*

ANNA. You must find the life here very dull?

NADEZHDA. Some people do complain about that. But I don't find it dull. I spend whole days reading books, or just sitting and thinking—

ANNA. What do you read? Novels?

NADEZHDA. What else? There used to be a rural official here—he shot himself afterward—

ANNA. Shot himself? Why?

DOCTOR (*with sullen bitterness*). Because of his love for her—

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*reproachfully*). You will put your foot in it—

NADEZHDA (*calmly*). He used to give me other books—not novels—But they were dull—and I couldn't read them. STYOPA *goes in.*

TSYGANOV. But do love stories ever happen in real life here?

NADEZHDA. How can they fail to happen? People here fall in love too—

ANNA. It must be a sorry kind of love.

NADEZHDA. Love is the same everywhere, if it is true love—

TSYGANOV. What is love?

NADEZHDA. The kind that is for life—

TSYGANOV. H'm—yes! You must have read many novels—I suppose you often listen to declarations of passion—

NADEZHDA. No, not very often. That official who shot himself used to write letters to me, and, before him, the peasant administrator made a declaration— (*The* DOCTOR *slowly withdraws to one side.*) But after that he went on a hunting trip, caught a cold while drunk, and died in three days—

ANNA (*with a shudder*). Died?

NADEZHDA. Yes. I didn't like him. He drank a lot, wheezed through his nose, and had a red face. Now the Doctor says that he is in love with me—

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*reproachfully*). Ah, Nadezhda! Why don't you keep still?

She rises and goes into the house. The DOCTOR, *standing among the trees, gazes fixedly at* NADEZHDA.

ANNA (*oppressed*). You talk of these things—so simply!

TSYGANOV (*seriously*). And what do you feel toward him?

NADEZHDA. Nothing. He resembles my husband—

TSYGANOV. Oh, no. I don't think he resembles him at all—

NADEZHDA. Yes, he does. They look different, but in their hearts they are brothers. They both love fishing, and any man that loves fishing is half dead—he sits over the water as if waiting for death.

TSYGANOV (*to* ANNA). She's got something there—

ANNA. Yegor would have liked that—

NADEZHDA. Your husband has such fascinating eyes! And his hair is just like fire! He's a fine man altogether—you can't forget him once you've seen him. The men here all have the same kind of eyes—in fact they seem to have no eyes at all—

ANNA (*in a low voice*). You're a strange woman.

TSYGANOV (*slowly*). Terrifying, I should say.

NADEZHDA (*smiling for the first time*). Do you really think so?

TSYGANOV. I swear—

NADEZHDA. The Doctor also tells me that—

ANNA (*in a low voice*). Poor Doctor!

MONAKHOV'S *laughter is heard from the house. He comes out, accompanied by* CHERKUN, *the* CHIEF OF POLICE, LYDIA, *and* BOGAYEVSKAYA.

CHERKUN. Anna! Yakov Alexeyevich is leaving— (*Walks aside with* LYDIA.)

ANNA. Won't you stay a while?

CHIEF OF POLICE. Thank you. It's enough for the first time. You know, Sergey Nikolayevich, without noticing it I drank all your sherry. It's very good!

TSYGANOV (*vacantly*). Wait a little, and I'll have more of that kind soon—

CHIEF OF POLICE. I wait—most impatiently! (*Laughs.*)

MONAKHOV (*coming over to the* DOCTOR). Well, how's everything, old man?

DOCTOR. All right. I think I'll have some more beer—

MONAKHOV. An excellent idea! (*Singing a snatch of a popular song.*) "Drink! Your anguish will go—"

CHIEF OF POLICE. So we're having an outing on the river tomorrow? I'll send the fire-brigade horses to fetch you at five in the afternoon. Would you like music, too?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. No, thank you. What pleasure is there in having your eardrums pierced? Besides, you may need the firemen in town—

CHIEF OF POLICE. Touch wood! I don't like blazes—or even weather that's hot as blazes, for that matter— (*Laughs.*) Well, I'll say good-by. I'm very glad to have such people as you living in our town—people who are—well, I won't go into all that—I'm not very good at speech-making—

NADEZHDA. Do you have your carriage?

CHIEF OF POLICE. Yes, ma'am! I'll be delighted to drive you home—

TSYGANOV. Why leave so early, Nadezhda Polikarpovna? Stay a little longer—

NADEZHDA. It's time for me to go. Good-by! I'm going home, Mavriky. Good-by, Anna Fyodorovna.

MONAKHOV. Going home? That's fine, Nadezhda—

ANNA. I shall always be glad to see you—

TSYGANOV. I, too.

CHIEF OF POLICE. She's a sight for sore eyes, isn't she? Your arm, ma'am! Good-by, Anna Fyodorovna! Don't forget Sergey Nikolayevich, I'll be waiting for something! Good night, my venerable Tatyana Nikolayevna!

BOGAYEVSKAYA. You're years ahead of time with your respects—you're much too considerate—

CHIEF OF POLICE. Nothing is too much for you. Incidentally, Anna Fyodorovna, I have to thank our Mayor for the opportunity of meeting you. He's a quarrelsome fellow, but if he hadn't complained about your husband, I might not have met you for God knows how long. Good-by! *He and* NADEZHDA *exit.*

ANNA (*crossing over to the* DOCTOR). Doctor, let's take a stroll through the garden—

DOCTOR. Well—I don't mind—

ANNA. You could at least say: "I shall be delighted."

DOCTOR. I've forgotten how to speak the human language.

They walk off talking. CHERKUN *and* LYDIA, *both looking serious and speaking in low tones, move toward the table.* TSYGANOV, *who has been gazing after the departing* NADEZHDA, *pours himself a big glass of something and drinks it. At the table* MONAKHOV *smacks his lips in approval.*

CHERKUN. You'll be dead drunk, Sergey!

TSYGANOV. Learn good manners from the Chief of Police, my friend—

CHERKUN (*to* LYDIA). Excuse me— (*To* TSYGANOV.) One moment, Sergey. Listen—that stupid female, the wife of the revenue collector, stared at me with such hungry eyes—

TSYGANOV. You're a fool, George—

CHERKUN, No, seriously—it makes me feel awkward—

TSYGANOV. Run along. The lady is waiting for you.

With a shrug of his shoulders CHERKUN *returns to* LYDIA. How about a glass of liqueur, Mavriky Osipovich?

MONAKHOV. That's a pleasure I wouldn't refuse even on my deathbed.

TSYGANOV. That's the right spirit. A cigar? You play cards, don't you?

MONAKHOV. What have I been given hands for?

TSYGANOV. Oh, you're a wit, too! A possessor of such a beautiful woman— (MONAKHOV *laughs.*) A good fellow like you—

MONAKHOV (*interrupting him*). Will you take a bet?

TSYGANOV. A bet on what?

MONAKHOV. I bet a hundred rubles to your fifty that you'll fall in love with my wife.

TSYGANOV (*looking at him intently with the elegant arrogance of a social superior*). You have nothing against it?

MONAKHOV (*drawing a zero in the air*). Exactly nothing! You have my blessing!

TSYGANOV (*more deliberately*). And what if she—let's assume such an accident were possible—falls in love with me?

MONAKHOV. I'll give you five hundred to one hundred she won't.

TSYGANOV (*laughing*). You're a delightful man. But we'll let it ride for the present, shall we? Let's have a game of cards instead. Call the Doctor. Then there's Pritykin in the house checking the accounts with our student. Let's get him—it will still leave him enough time to cheat us on the accounts, won't it?

He walks toward the house where ANNA *is heard playing some sad music on the piano.*

MONAKHOV. It will, certainly.

TSYGANOV. People are growing smaller, crooks bigger.

MONAKHOV *laughs.* CHERKUN *and* LYDIA *emerge from behind the trees and, walking slowly, stop at the table. They remain standing.*

CHERKUN. Will you stay here long?

LYDIA. I don't know. Probably a month—

CHERKUN. I'll be here almost until winter—until late autumn—

LYDIA. I don't like small towns—they're made up of insignificant people. When I'm among them I ask myself—are they humans at all?

CHERKUN. That's right. Energy stops flowing in their midst. In big cities it surges day and night. There you see the incessant friction

of hostile forces—there the battle for life never ceases. Lights burn there, music plays. There you have everything that's attractive in life—

LYDIA. The big city, I feel, is like a symphony—like a magician's palace of wonders—it has everything and you can pick up whatever you want there. There you have the desire to live!

CHERKUN. Yes—to live! I want to live fully, avidly. I've seen and experienced all kinds of hardship and filth. There was a time I had to swallow my pride in order to eat. And you could never imagine the humiliations that are heaped on a man just because his linen isn't too clean or his nails not properly cared for.

LYDIA. I see you didn't have a happy life—

CHERKUN. I didn't. I still have to square accounts with people for the past—I certainly do. I have no pity, no forbearance, for the greedy, thick-skulled animals who rule our life. And it drives me mad to see the helpless resignation of those who submit—

LYDIA. You're not very happy even now, are you?

CHERKUN. Now? No—I can't say that I am.

LYDIA (*with a wave of her hand*). You ought to have something different from this— A wide battlefield is what you need. I feel you're capable of something big, important—you're so—direct and unbending. But do you know your own value? It doesn't matter if one sets his value at a high level—one can raise himself—jump to reach the mark. But to set one's value low is to stoop and let others jump over you.

CHERKUN. I understand—

LYDIA. I believe a man doesn't have to have much. But what he does have—let that be truly magnificent. We mustn't be greedy—we mustn't clutter up our hearts with the cheap and the paltry. Life will become beautiful only when people learn to desire what's rare—

CHERKUN. You have romantic ideas, don't you?

LYDIA. Is that such a bad thing? Who's this coming?

Enter DUNKA'S HUSBAND, *looking even more untidy than in the first act. He is drunk and walks with a swagger.*

CHERKUN. What do you want?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND (*talking with an inspired air*). Allow me to tell you—I am the father!

CHERKUN. Whose father?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Hers—your maid's—Styopa's. She's run away from me. So I demand—because I'm her father. Sorry—but I have the right to demand—

CHERKUN. My father was something like that—

LYDIA. Tell him to go. He's disgusting.

CHERKUN. What do you want?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Her wages. Whose daughter is she? Mine. So her wages are mine too, and I can demand it— Or else I'll take her

away, as being my daughter. Pavlin says nobody can keep somebody else's daughter if she's a runaway, and the father can always demand her wages—Pavlin says—

CHERKUN. You're no father. To bring a child into the world doesn't necessarily mean that one is its father. A father is a man. Do you call yourself a man?

LYDIA (*with a chuckle*). How young you are! He'll never understand what you're talking about.

CHERKUN. That's true. Now—get out of here!

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. What about the wages?

ANNA *comes out of the house. She stops and listens.*

CHERKUN. Get out!

DUNKA'S HUSBAND (*scared and somewhat sobered*). All right—I'll go. But give me something—half a ruble, say—

LYDIA (*tossing a coin*). Please go.

CHERKUN. Off with you! Quick!

DUNKA'S HUSBAND *exits rapidly without glancing back.* ANNA *looks on, half hidden by the shrubs.*

LYDIA (*smiling*). It's so simple. Now he's traded his daughter for a small piece of bad silver. And there are some who want to make us pity, even love, such people. Do you agree with that? It won't help them. And how can one love them? Oh!—Anna Fyodorovna! Have you tired of your guests?

ANNA (*dryly*). No, I don't mind them. They're having a game of cards. I've come out to see—

CHERKUN (*suspiciously*). See what?

ANNA. I saw that wretched man walk into the garden—

LYDIA. Well, I'll go home. I'll be seeing you in the evening, so I shan't say good-by.

CHERKUN. Oh, yes—we'll meet tonight—

LYDIA *leaves.* CHERKUN *looks after her.* ANNA *watches him, biting her lips.* STYOPA *rushes out to her.*

STYOPA. He came—for me?

ANNA. No, Styopa—it was something else— Don't be afraid.

STYOPA. For God's sake, don't let him take me away!

ANNA. But of course! Calm yourself and go back to the house.

STYOPA. I'll enter a convent. They won't let him in there—they won't, will they?

CHERKUN. Forget it, Styopa! It's all nonsense! He can do nothing to you.

ANNA. We won't let him take you away from us.

STYOPA (*walking toward the house*). Oh, Lord!

ANNA. I think, Yegor, we must somehow make that man understand—

CHERKUN (*sharply*). We must do nothing "somehow."

ANNA (*affectionately*). Are you annoyed, Yegor?

CHERKUN. I'm not. But I want to tell you—you show your enmity to Lydia Pavlovna too openly.

ANNA. I don't understand. What gave you that impression?

CHERKUN. Lies are always unnecessary, particularly between you and me, Anna. I like her—her company is interesting. You see this and are afraid.

ANNA (*in an alarmed tone*). What am I afraid of? I'm—I'm not afraid of anything.

CHERKUN. I'm not blind, Anna.

ANNA. What do you see? Tell me—quick— No, don't tell me—I beg of you—don't.

CHERKUN (*unpleasantly*). You're shouting, Anna.

ANNA. Don't say anything—I implore you— Let me get accustomed to the thought—

CHERKUN. The thought's been with you a long time already, and you haven't got accustomed to it.

ANNA. But what if I can't? Don't you understand, I love you—I love you—I forgive you everything—

CHERKUN. I don't need your forgiveness—

ANNA. I'm an ordinary woman, a dull companion—I know that. But I love you. I can't live without you—I just can't. Do I deserve to be despised for that? Or be treated—so cruelly?

CHERKUN. I don't despise you. That's not true. But I don't love you any more. And that's the truth.

ANNA. But you did love me. No—you can't mean what you say.

CHERKUN. That love has burned out. And the men who live with their wives without love are either libertines—or hypocrites.

ANNA. No, wait, wait. Give me a little time. I'll try—perhaps I'll change—perhaps I shan't be so uninteresting.

CHERKUN. Anna! You ought to be ashamed. How can you repudiate yourself?

ANNA. My dearest! My beloved! I can't live without you—

CHERKUN (*firmly*). And I cannot live with you—

Goes into the house. ANNA, *crushed, slowly seats herself at the table. There is a sound as of somebody clambering over the fence.* ANNA *does not hear it. Out bursts* KATYA *from behind the trees.*

KATYA (*putting her arms around* ANNA). You poor darling— You mustn't cry. He's a rotter!

ANNA (*jumping to her feet*). Go away! Who are you?

KATYA. He's a fool. How can any man talk like that—or fail to love you?

ANNA. Who are you? How did you get here?

KATYA. I am Katya Redozubova—from next door. Leave him—you're young, you'll love again—another man, who's fine and kind. As for him, I'd slap his face.

ANNA. Why did you listen? Oh, my God!

KATYA. I know everything that's going on here—I've been watching through a crack for days—and I love you so much—so much!

ANNA (*somewhat recovered*). It's not nice—to eavesdrop—

KATYA. Why isn't it nice? One must see everything—it's interesting. If I hadn't come, you would have been sitting alone and crying. Now I shall comfort you— STEPAN LUKIN *is approaching them.*

ANNA. Don't say anything. Remember— You know—you've heard nothing— I beg of you!

KATYA (*with an air of importance*). I understand. Oh, it's that one!

STEPAN (*taking off his peaked cap in greeting*). None other! Did your ladyship come here by climbing over the fence?

KATYA. It's none of your business. You think if I climb over the fence I'm a nitwit? I have as much brains as you have. Go away.

STEPAN. Dear me! What did I do to earn this wrath?

KATYA. Hold your tongue! Nobody's talking to you. Let's go! (*Takes* ANNA'S *arm.*)

ANNA. I'm very sorry—but I'm busy—

KATYA. I understand—I'll keep you company— Let's go.

Leads ANNA *away.* STEPAN *is perplexed.* REDOZUBOV *and* PAVLIN *appear, the former agitated and disheveled.*

REDOZUBOV. You're a witness, Pavlin. First they lured my son in and made him drunk—now they've got hold of my daughter. (*To* STEPAN.) You're a servant here, aren't you? Call your masters—

STEPAN. You're mistaken, my friend.

REDOZUBOV. I don't care. This is a den of iniquity, I tell you. Well, call the head of the house.

STEPAN. I won't.

REDOZUBOV. What? You refuse to do what I tell you?

CHERKUN *has come out of the house.*

PAVLIN. He's a student—

REDOZUBOV. I see! The same gang!

CHERKUN (*calmly*). What's the matter?

REDOZUBOV. Where's my daughter?

CHERKUN. How do I know?

REDOZUBOV. You're lying. Where is she?

CHERKUN. Now, look. Your daughter threw stones at me—and that's all I know about her. Understand? KATYA *enters on the run.*

REDOZUBOV. And who's this? Who gave you permission, Katerina?

KATYA. There—there— Calm yourself— Come this way. Come on, I say, don't be afraid. He won't follow us—

REDOZUBOV. This is no place for you, my daughter—

KATYA (*to* CHERKUN). Don't you follow us! You hear me? Monster!

Hurries off again, pulling her father along. STEPAN *laughs.* CHERKUN *looks at him, smiling.* PAVLIN, *his lips compressed, watches disapprovingly.*

CHERKUN. It's all very absurd—but quite charming! A delightful girl! Comes to your house—orders you about— Huh!

STEPAN (*laughing*). By God! She certainly has a way with her, chief!

CHERKUN. I'll talk to the old man.

GRISHA'S *head pops up over the fence. It wears a frightened expression.*

PAVLIN. Permit me to say—you have completely shaken and violated him.

CHERKUN (*to* STEPAN). Who's he?

STEPAN (*with a chuckle*). A local sage, and everything else as needed—

GRISHA. I say, sir!

CHERKUN. Yes?

GRISHA. He didn't beat me up—he didn't—honest!

KATYA (*rushing back*). Hey you! Come here. Father wants you. What are you grinning for? I know all about you—you carrot top!

She sticks out her tongue and runs away. STEPAN *bursts into laughter.* PAVLIN *looks perplexed.* CHERKUN *smiles and starts after* KATYA. GRISHA *watches him warily.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

Two months later. The same garden. Evening. The sun is setting. Colored lanterns decorate the trees. The table is laid with wines and light refreshments. Around it are chairs in no particular order. STYOPA *is busy at the table, while under the trees, looking spruce,* MATVEY *is opening the bottles of wine. Far at the back,* PRITYKIN *is standing by the fence, and close beside him* MONAKHOV *is playing a clarinet softly. There is noise from the house. Somebody is picking out the "Chizhik" on the piano with one finger and keeps hitting the wrong notes. The* CHIEF OF POLICE *is heard laughing.*

MATVEY. I've already put by three hundred—

STYOPA. What's it to me?

MATVEY. That shows I'm no fool—

STYOPA. I didn't say you were a fool. But you are greedy— You always talk about money—like all peasants—

MATVEY. Peasants—so what?

CHERKUN *appears, heading for the table, followed by* NADEZHDA.

CHERKUN. Bring some soda water, Styopa. (*To* NADEZHDA.) Have you come out for a breath of fresh air too? It's stuffy there, isn't it?

NADEZHDA. No, it's all right.

CHERKUN. Why do you look at me—so strangely?

NADEZHDA (*in a low voice*). There is nothing strange about it.

CHERKUN (*with a smile*). Shall I give you some cold water—or soda?

NADEZHDA. No, I don't want any.

CHERKUN (*turning back to the house*). Well, I'll go and finish the game— NADEZHDA *follows him in slowly.*

MATVEY (*stubbornly*). What if I am a peasant? Stepan Danilych is a student and knows everything. He says at one time all men were peasants. Then later those who were clever—they became masters. So you see?

STYOPA. Leave me alone—I don't care for your type.

MATVEY. You will care if we get married. I'm strong and healthy—

STYOPA (*as if speaking to herself*). I'll enter a convent—

The CHIEF OF POLICE *and* TSYGANOV, *both slightly drunk, come out and make for the table.*

MATVEY (*laughing*). You're a liar! Enter a convent, will you?

CHIEF OF POLICE (*at the table*). Everything is delightful here—only the refreshments and liquor are too far away.

TSYGANOV (*pouring wine*). She is an epic woman—

CHIEF OF POLICE. You're still talking about her? Y-yes, she is a wild animal. I've been laying siege to her for two years— I'm not repulsive, as you will agree, besides being a military man and so forth. And what does she say? "You're not a hero." Why am I not a hero? No reason given. And what is a hero, anyway? It's absurd— In a country town suddenly there should be a hero!

MONAKHOV *and* PRITYKIN *come forward toward the table.*

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*calling, off stage*). Yakov Alexeyevich! It's your turn to deal!

CHIEF OF POLICE (*starting for the house and taking along the remnants of what he has been eating*). I'm coming—

TSYGANOV (*to* MONAKHOV). We've been talking about your wife.

MONAKHOV. I'm happy to hear it— May I ask what it is you were saying, if it's not a secret?

TSYGANOV. We've been trying to make her out. We haven't succeeded.

PRITYKIN. It's always very difficult to make out a woman—

MONAKHOV. Are you talking about Vesyolkina?

PRITYKIN (*tugging at his sleeve*). No, I mean in general— Few men understand women—

MONAKHOV. What I need to, I understand quite well, my friend. And what I don't need, I don't bother about.

PRITYKIN. It's less of a strain that way, of course. Anyhow, one can never understand everything.

TSYGANOV. Where did you find her, my friend?

MONAKHOV. I noticed her at Mass at the parochial school.

PRITYKIN. There she is—coming this way—with the Doctor in attendance—

He laughs, MONAKHOV *joining in but less genuinely.* TSYGANOV *looks at them, waggling his mustache disdainfully.*

MONAKHOV (*to* TSYGANOV). I can tell you one thing—she doesn't approve of your Maupassant—says he's dull, everything is too short. But I like him. Some of his things are—O la, la!

Enter NADEZHDA.

TSYGANOV. Have another glass of champagne, Nadezhda Polikarpovna.

NADEZHDA. Yes, please. I like it very much.

MONAKHOV. Look out, Nadezhda, you'll get drunk—

NADEZHDA. You're so coarse! People will think I've been drunk before. Why do you parade about with that stick? (*Pointing to the clarinet which he still carries.*)

MONAKHOV. Well, I'll be playing soon.

PRITYKIN (*taking* MONAKHOV's *arm*). Let's go watch the Chief of Police playing his trumps— (*They start toward the house,* MONAKHOV *with reluctance.*)

TSYGANOV (*handing her a glass of wine*). Don't you like the clarinet?

NADEZHDA. I like the guitar—it can be played very affectingly. But the clarinet always sounds as if it had a cold. You drink too much, Doctor—

DOCTOR. My name is Pavel Ivanovich.

TSYGANOV. Imagine that! Strange—isn't it—it's the first time I've heard your name.

DOCTOR. Names are nothing. Why, people don't even notice one's soul here—

TSYGANOV. Why are you always so somber, my dear Pavel Ivanovich?

DOCTOR. Not everybody is capable of laughing in a mortuary—

CHERKUN (*shouting from indoors*). Sergey! Lydia Pavlovna wants you—

TSYGANOV. Excuse me—I'm coming. (*He goes in.*)

DOCTOR (*turning his heavy gaze on* NADEZHDA). Do you like that man?

NADEZHDA. He's quite pleasant. He speaks interestingly, and he's always neatly dressed.

DOCTOR (*in a low dull voice*). He's a villain. He wants to debauch you— And he'll do it, the villain!

NADEZHDA. You always damn everybody, and when you do it one can see that you have bad teeth—

DOCTOR (*with passion and anguish*). Nadezhda—I cannot bear seeing you among these people. It will kill me. Out of the depths of my soul I beg you—give them up! They're greedy—nothing's sacred to them—they're ready to devour anything—

NADEZHDA (*rising*). I don't want you to speak to me like that—

DOCTOR. Don't go away! Listen to me—you're like the earth—you're rich in creative force—you carry a great love within you. Give me a tiny fraction of it. I'm all broken—crushed by passion. I'll love you with all the fire of my soul as long as I live.

NADEZHDA. Goodness gracious! But if I don't like you at all! Look at yourself—you call yourself a lover? It's simply ridiculous—

DOCTOR. Now wait—remember this—I'll lie across your path—you'll see! You've already killed one man—I'll be the second—the moment I see that this blackguard has taken possession of you—

NADEZHDA (*showing slight annoyance*). You're really a very stupid man. How can anybody take possession of me, if I don't want him to? Besides, it has nothing to do with you— You're so annoying—it's positively unbearable!

VESYOLKINA (*rushing in*). Can you imagine? Such a surprise! Anna Fyodorovna has suddenly walked in. I don't understand what's going on. Does it mean they never separated? Or have they made up? And what about Lydia Pavlovna? He's in love with her—that's certain!

The DOCTOR *moves to the table and stares at* MONAKHOV *who has come out of the house.*

NADEZHDA (*slowly*). How interesting— Only I don't believe—that he is in love with Lydia Pavlovna—

VESYOLKINA. How can you say that? The whole town knows it for a fact.

NADEZHDA. Nobody can know this, my dear, because it is in the heart.

VESYOLKINA. But also in the eyes, and in the voice—

NADEZHDA (*pensively*). But why did his wife come back? Well, she's not a dangerous rival—

DOCTOR. To whom?

NADEZHDA (*after a pause, slowly*). What business is that of yours?

VESYOLKINA (*to the* DOCTOR). Are you unwell? You look—

DOCTOR (*in a low voice, like an echo*). What business is that of yours?

VESYOLKINA. You are rude! Come, dear, let's see how it all turns out—

She and NADEZHDA *go in.* MONAKHOV *emerges from behind the trees and walks over to the* DOCTOR, *a smile on his lips.*

MONAKHOV. Well, how's everything?

DOCTOR. You've asked me this clever question a hundred times—What do you want to know? Well?

MONAKHOV. Sh-sh! You're a queer duck. I don't want to know anything—I know all I need to—

DOCTOR (*spitefully*). You know—that I love your wife?

MONAKHOV (*quietly, with a smile*). Who doesn't know that, my friend?

DOCTOR (*turning to walk away*). Then you can go to hell!

MONAKHOV (*catching him by the sleeve*). Sh-sh! Why use strong words? We are not born for high blood pressure, said the poet. Besides, I don't like dramatics.

DOCTOR (*quietly, but sharply*). What do you want?

MONAKHOV (*mysteriously*). I want her to experience a sorrow—to suffer a blow—but not from me. Nor from you, my friend. I feel sorry for you—I have a kind heart, you know—and I see—everything—everything. A blow will make her softer—sorrow softens one—you understand me, don't you?

DOCTOR. Are you drunk? Or are you—

MONAKHOV (*with a chuckle*). I've had a few—like everybody else. And why shouldn't I? It's very pleasant.

DOCTOR (*bitterly*). You're nothing but a snake—

He walks off with rapid strides. MONAKHOV *goes to the table. A strange, pained smile twists his lips. Grumbling, he pours himself some wine.*

MONAKHOV. You are hurt, my friend? What about me?

PELAGEYA PRITYKINA *comes out of the house followed by* DROBYAZGIN *and* VESYOLKINA.

PRITYKINA. Have you heard the news, Mavriky Osipovich?

MONAKHOV. What news?

VESYOLKINA. Cherkun's wife has come back to him.

MONAKHOV. She's come back, has she? H'm! And how is one to regard this happening?

PRITYKINA. Can't you see for yourself?

VESYOLKINA. Why, he's in love with Lydia Pavlovna!

DROBYAZGIN (*hastening to put in a word*). I think they suit each other beautifully—

MONAKHOV. That's fine—

PRITYKINA. What's fine about it?

DROBYAZGIN *glances about, picks a pear from the table, and eats it furtively.*

MONAKHOV. Everything— It's fine that they suit each other—that she's come back—that you are all fine people—that I'm a good man. The main thing is not to interfere with one another— (*He laughs and goes off.*)

PRITYKINA. He's right there—he is a good man. Only he doesn't understand much—

VESYOLKINA. He's too busy to understand—he has to watch his wife—

DROBYAZGIN. Nadezhda Polikarpovna is a modest woman—

VESYOLKINA. You know everything. Why, she's only waiting for a chance to fall in love with somebody—

DROBYAZGIN. That's what everybody wants to do—even hens.

PRITYKINA (*with a sigh*). That's true—everybody wants that—

VESYOLKINA. Do you love your husband, Pelageya Ivanovna?

PRITYKINA. I do, very much. But he's not overfond of me. Well, what can you do? It's my own fault—a forty-year-old shouldn't marry a twenty. Look, the Mayor and our Tatyana Nikolayevna—a darling woman!

Approaching from the house are BOGAYEVSKAYA *and* REDOZUBOV, *with* GRISHA *and* PAVLIN. DROBYAZGIN *draws himself up, assuming a deferential look.* GRISHA *grimaces at him in a friendly way, which causes* VESYOLKINA *to laugh.*

PAVLIN. I say to her—it's easy to go into a convent, girl, but you take your abominable parent and warm him with your heart, and that'll be burden enough, I say, that'll be a cross—

REDOZUBOV. You hear that, Grishka?

GRISHA. I heard it— But I don't want to go into a monastery. So what's it got to do with me?

REDOZUBOV. You're a fool!

PRITYKINA. How fine you have everything here, Tatyana Nikolayevna. Lots of everything—and everything so tasty, so delicate! Oh, it's such a pleasure to be here!

BOGAYEVSKAYA. I'm glad you like it— Oh, it's so hot!

PRITYKINA. Have some lemonade with cognac. Monsieur Tsyganov has taught me to drink lemonade with cognac. It's refreshing.

REDOZUBOV (*wearily*). Why did you ask me here, Tatyana Nikolayevna? I should have stayed at home. Pavlin says this is a Belshazzar's feast—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. If you don't like being here, leave your children and go home. As for Pavlin, he talks nonsense, even if he is an old man—

REDOZUBOV (*pensively*). He's got me under his thumb! Whatever he wants me to do, I do it—I—Redozubov!

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Well, he saves you from doing many foolish things. You ought to have been restrained long ago.

REDOZUBOV. Well, I've torn down my pillars. And I'd held on to them for seven years—spent a fortune fighting for my rights—

PAVLIN. It is a pity the pillars are gone. They were a fine ornament in the street—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. That's a lie!

PRITYKINA. They made driving difficult—but otherwise they were all right. Anybody who saw them would ask— Whose pillars are those?—So everybody knew that Verkhopolye had a Mayor—Redozubov—

REDOZUBOV. Grishka! Why do you keep staring at the bottles!

GRISHA. I don't mean anything, Father—I just thought what a lot of them!

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Why do you bawl at him? You've made him a fool, and now you're angry with him—

REDOZUBOV. Do you think I don't see what's going on? These free-

thinkers here—they are barbarians—wreckers! They topple everything over—at their touch everything falls—

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*yawning*). It must have been poorly built—

REDOZUBOV. You are a gentlewoman—you're not sorry for anything. You gentlefolk made everything with other people's hands—so you don't care. But we have to toil and moil—that makes a difference!

BOGAYEVSKAYA. No, we haven't been greedy—that's true. And what we made well, my friend, has stayed on. Now when you die, there will remain only a ruined, robbed land where you lived.

REDOZUBOV (*crossly*). Get away from there, Grishka! Where's Katerina? *The* CHIEF OF POLICE *and* PRITYKIN *come out.* Call her home—both of you, come! There's Pritykin— Is he as good as I am? Yet he's treated as my equal— (*He walks out of the garden, followed by* PAVLIN.)

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken like that to the old man. I'm an idiot!

PRITYKINA. What about him, dear? How did he speak?

CHIEF OF POLICE. Your house is an Eden, Tatyana Nikolayevna, and you yourself are a goddess.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Yes, a striking likeness, isn't it?

CHIEF OF POLICE. Therefore I wish you'd celebrate your birthday at least fifty times more.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Won't that be too much?

PRITYKIN. He's quite right, Tatyana Nikolayevna. In another place Redozubov would have barked at me like a dog—but not in your house—here he couldn't because everybody respects you and no one can do anything—

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*calmly*). They know I can turn them out of the house—

CHIEF OF POLICE. Bravo!

PRITYKIN (*elated*). Don't they know it!

PRITYKINA (*with a sigh*). It's a very good thing when a man feels he can be put out!

PRITYKIN (*to his wife, bristling*). Who are you talking about?

PRITYKINA. No one in particular. Did you think I meant you?

PRITYKIN. A good thing you didn't.

CHIEF OF POLICE. Quiet! We've had our refreshments, and we've had our drinks. It's now time—

PRITYKIN. For a game of cards.

PRITYKINA. Make it high stakes and I'll join you.

CHIEF OF POLICE. You'll excuse me—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Certainly. Please go right ahead.

The guests move into the house. BOGAYEVSKAYA *sits in an armchair, fanning herself with a handkerchief.* STEPAN'S *voice is heard off right.* MATVEY *hangs and trims lanterns.* STEPAN *and* KATYA

appear, walking side by side. As usual, STEPAN *speaks sharply and somewhat ironically.*

STEPAN. The great fire of reason is burning there and in its light everybody who is honest and intelligent sees how dirty and badly arranged life is.

KATYA (*quietly*). Are there many there who are honest and intelligent?

STEPAN (*with a smile*). Well, not too many. (BOGAYEVSKAYA *laughs quietly.*) That's precisely why I say—go there! If only to devote just three years of your youth to the dreams of a new life and the struggle for these dreams. Throw a little part of your heart into the common bonfire of protest against vulgar smugness and falsehood—

KATYA (*simply*). I'll go.

STEPAN. It's possible that you'll get frightened and return to your slough—but you'll have something to remember your youth by—and that's a good reward for whatever you may be able to give—

KATYA. I won't return.

STEPAN. Not a sound of that life ever drifts here—to this devil's backwater. Just look how blind, deaf, and stupid the people here are—

KATYA (*startled at the thought*). Monakhov and the Doctor are just like frogs—

STEPAN. What can you do here? Suppose you marry some wretched businessman on the style of your brother— (*He notices* BOGAYEVSKAYA *and, a little embarrassed, straightens his peaked cap.*)

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*smiling*). Well, my boy? Why embarrassed? He speaks bravely, Katya. He promises nothing—and that's fine. When he begins making promises—don't believe him—

STEPAN (*sincerely, but a little rudely*). You know, you're a good sort—I swear!

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Never mind that! Get on with your walk! Live! (STEPAN *and* KATYA *stroll away.*) You dear humans!

LYDIA *appears, reading a note. Her eyebrows move nervously.* Lydia dear!

LYDIA. Oh, you're here. Tired of those people?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. At my age people soon get tiresome. Come, I want to tell you something—sit down. You see I've lived here for thirteen years without going away once. I've grown wild, and there are many things I don't understand now. So you must forgive me if I say something that is not right.

LYDIA (*laying her hand on* BOGAYEVSKAYA's *shoulder*). We'd better not talk about it. It's about my relations with Cherkun, isn't it?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. That's right. They're wagging their tongues here, winking at one another.

LYDIA. What are they to us?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Well—then there's nothing to talk about.

LYDIA (*pensively*). Here—if you are interested— His wife has sent me a note in which she informs me that she has no ill feeling against me—or something to that effect. What a wretched lot people are, aren't they?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. People? Yes. But I'm sorry for her—

LYDIA (*smiling*). I hope you don't think me capable of robbing a beggar of his only crust of bread?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. How can you say that, Lydia dear? You are a Bogayevskaya, and that's enough to make you know your worth— Well, I've rested. Now I'll go back to them. Tell me—do you like him?

LYDIA. Not overwhelmingly. But among others—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. He's rough—and rude. Well, may God give you happiness.

LYDIA. Oh, Auntie—if I want anything, I'll take it myself.

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*in a quiet tone*). Here they come.

LYDIA (*with a shrug*). Why whisper?

ANNA, NADEZHDA, *and* CHERKUN *are approaching from the house.*

BOGAYEVSKAYA. How are you, Anna Fyodorovna? I'm doubly pleased —that you've arrived—and that it's on my birthday.

ANNA (*speaking with nervous animation*). My congratulations— How are you, Lydia Pavlovna? (LYDIA *shakes hands with her, smiling silently.*) I feel so strange—I spent these months almost alone, in an out-of-the-way country place in complete quiet. And now I've dropped right into all this bustle. It makes my head swim!

CHERKUN (*glumly*). You ought to go and rest—

ANNA. Later—where is Katya?

NADEZHDA (*to* LYDIA). Anna Fyodorovna has become so pretty— just look at her!

LYDIA. She was always just as beautiful—I think—

KATYA (*rushing in*). You've come! Oh, how wonderful—I'm so happy to see you here, darling. But you've grown so thin—and your eyes—

They embrace. CHERKUN *knits his brows.* NADEZHDA *watches him and* LYDIA. VESYOLKINA *and* MONAKHOV *are in the background, strolling through the shrubbery.*

ANNA. What about my eyes?

KATYA. They are so serious—so troubled—

ANNA. Tell me, how are you doing?

KATYA. I'm doing fine— It's so interesting. I go for walks with Stepan. My father gets after me for it—oh, how he nags! But Stepan— well, he's so clever. Only he talks to me as if I were a little girl. He speaks to the peasants much better. Shall we take a walk?

ANNA (*moving away with* KATYA). He's almost a peasant himself—

TSYGANOV *comes out.* CHERKUN *gazes after his wife;* MONAKHOV *smiles at him from among the trees. The* DOCTOR *is seen farther*

off in the garden. LYDIA *is peeling a pear, and humming to herself.*

CHERKUN. Why did you leave the guests?

TSYGANOV. Nadezhda Polikarpovna had gone out—and away from her I feel as if I were in the wrong place—

NADEZHDA. How good you are at making compliments—one can't even figure them out right away—

TSYGANOV. Thank you for the compliment.

NADEZHDA. Now Yegor Petrovich—he never says sweet words—

LYDIA *goes into the house.*

TSYGANOV. He's a wild man, without manners—

NADEZHDA. Mavriky! What have you found there?

MONAKHOV. A spider—

NADEZHDA. Disgusting!

MONAKHOV. I love observing things— It's very instructive—

TSYGANOV. And what do you learn from the spider?

MONAKHOV. Well, he's just caught a bug. But he's very tiny and unable to cope with it. So after fussing around it he's run over to a neighbor, as if to say to him: Help me eat it—

DOCTOR (*from some distance away, rudely and in a thick voice*). He's acting as you do, Monakhov—precisely like you— (*He walks off.*)

TSYGANOV. What's that?

NADEZHDA. My goodness! He quite frightened me.

MONAKHOV. He's had too much to drink. People often philosophize when they are drunk— (*Starts off in the* DOCTOR'S *direction.*)

CHERKUN. That Doctor is an extraordinarily rude animal.

TSYGANOV. Do you hear how this carroty gentleman talks?

NADEZHDA. He's telling the truth—and it's a very fine thing. And everything Yegor Petrovich says is beautiful—

TSYGANOV. Well, George, I feel we'll have to shoot it out between us. Come, my goddess, let's get away from him—he has a bad effect on my nerves. Let's walk in the garden and talk about love—

NADEZHDA (*moving toward the shrubbery*). Yegor Petrovich never talks about love—

TSYGANOV. Ah! But he's a man completely lacking in passion—

NADEZHDA. Is he? I know better. I like the way you call him George —it's lovely.

They walk off. CHERKUN, *looking troubled, drums with his fingers on the table and whistles a shrill tune.* ANNA, KATYA, *and* STEPAN *come back from their round of the garden.* PRITYKIN'S *triumphant voice is heard from the house. By the time* ANNA *begins to talk about children,* PRITYKIN, *the* CHIEF OF POLICE, PRITYKINA, MONAKHOVA, *and* GRISHA *have gathered at the table.* GRISHA *devotes all his attention to studying the labels on the bottles.*

PRITYKIN (*appearing in the doorway*). That old devil Redozubov

will remember me hereafter—what didn't I say to him—whew! He's afraid to say anything to me—but I can—I'm like one of the family here. (*He laughs.*)

ANNA. Only two months have gone, it seems like years. It was so frightening—

STEPAN. Y-yes. That sort of life is no laughing matter—

ANNA. You know, Katya, there are people who get pleasure out of beating women—hitting them in the eyes, the face, till they bleed—kicking them with their feet— Can you picture it?

KATYA (*quietly, after a pause*). I know. My father used to beat my mother. He beats up Grisha—

ANNA (*wearily*). Oh, God—my darling child!

CHERKUN. Sit down, Anna. Don't excite yourself—

STEPAN. It amuses me to hear you—as if you only learned how to see yesterday.

ANNA. Some of the children in the villages are simply terrible. They're infected—with a disease— Their eyes look troubled and sad, like tapers at a funeral. Yet the mothers beat and curse their children for having been born sick. Oh, if people only knew what foundations their lives are built on!

PRITYKIN. We know. It's something new to you, but we know it very well. The people in the villages are nothing but wild beasts—and they're getting worse and worse every year. The women may be a little less wild, but the men are regular thugs.

MONAKHOV. So are the women. Who does the illicit selling of vodka?

CHIEF OF POLICE. That's a fact. And do you know how they poison their husbands? They make a cabbage pie with arsenic and offer it to the man. And that's that.

KATYA (*heatedly*). What else can they do when their husbands beat them? It serves them right.

PRITYKINA (*with alarm*). My dear! How can you say such things?

CHIEF OF POLICE (*jestingly*). Madam, for such speeches, I'm going to put you—

KATYA. Don't breathe at me— Oh!

ANNA (*in confusion*). But if you know all this—

CHERKUN. Don't be naïve, Anna—

STEPAN (*smiling*). Whom do you expect to surprise here?

KATYA. I do hate your smile! What are you always laughing at?

STEPAN. The world's full of indescribable crimes—and the criminals are never punished. They continue to rule life and all you do is cry Oh! and Ah!

The CHIEF OF POLICE *takes* PRITYKIN *by the arm and they walk off.*

KATYA. But what's to be done?

ANNA. What must we do?

GRISHA *looks about, picks up a bottle, and disappears with it.*

STEPAN. Open the eyes of those born blind—you can do no more!

CHERKUN. We have to build new highways—railways— Iron is the force which will destroy this stupid, wooden life.

STEPAN. And men themselves must be like iron to be able to destroy this life. This we cannot do. We can't even destroy what has already lived out its time—help the dead matter to decay—it's too close and dear to our hearts. It won't be we, it seems, who will create the new —not we! And the sooner we realize this the better—it will put every one of us in his right place—

MONAKHOV (*to* KATYA). Your darling brother has taken a bottle of chartreuse and see there—he's drinking it!

KATYA (*running out after him*). Oh, the dirty—!

MONAKHOV. That liqueur is certainly powerful.

GRISHA (*off stage*). What's it got to do with you? It's not yours. Get away—I won't give it up!

STEPAN (*hurrying toward the altercation*). He may knock her on the head—

ANNA. Is Sergey Nikolayevich still educating him?

CHERKUN. I don't think Sergey ever taught him to steal bottles of liquor—

ANNA. Did he teach him to drink? (*She looks about and begins quickly and nervously.*) Yegor, to make everything clear at once, I've come back to you—

CHERKUN. Let's put this off till some other time—

ANNA. No, wait. I've become reconciled to the thought we are strangers—that I am a stranger to you—

CHERKUN (*quietly, with a smile*). A stranger? Were we bound together only by kisses?

ANNA (*wearily*). No—I don't know. All I can say is that I find life without you difficult. I'm stupid—so helpless. I know nothing—I can do nothing—

CHERKUN. Listen— Tell me in so many words: What do you want of me?

ANNA. Don't try to hurt me! I haven't come to beg for alms. Yes, I love you, Yegor—I love you with all my heart. But I know—if you've decided—I know it's useless.

CHERKUN (*in an undertone*). Why must we tear at each other, Anna?

ANNA. My love may be a little thing, but it torments me— No, don't go. I'm ashamed of my love. At first I felt offended, hurt—I thought of dying when I left you—

CHERKUN (*sullenly*). What can I say to you? I don't understand you—

ANNA (*frightened and pleading*). I'm so helpless—so weak— Everything is so terrifying when I'm alone—

CHERKUN (*firmly*). Anna, I must know what you want—

ANNA. All I want is to be near you a little while longer—only a

little while. I won't be in your way—live as you please. But it's necessary to me—

CHERKUN (*sullenly*). You'll find it hard—I warn you.

KATYA *is returning.*

ANNA (*with a faint smile*). Then I'll go—I'll go. You see, I don't understand anything—I didn't think seriously of anything until that happened. You must teach me—

KATYA. What are you discussing?

ANNA. Life, my dear. (*To* CHERKUN.) You must give me something to replace what you've taken—

CHERKUN. I don't know how to do that. I don't know, Anna. I feel embarrassed—

KATYA (*disagreeably*). Oh, embarrassed! At last! (*Stamping her foot.*) Oh, I hate men! One day I'll polish this Stepan off, he'll remember me!

ANNA (*with a smile*). I'm also embarrassed—and hurt at being what I am. But where can I go? I don't know. In my family everything is just as it used to be in the old days. They all think they've been wronged and feel resentful—complain. The old furniture and books, the old interests—it's all so cold and dead. Sometimes they get frightened suddenly, begin to fret and talk bitterly about how their life has been spoiled—other times they move around in a daze, living on memories—

TSYGANOV *and* NADEZHDA *return, coming to the table.* TSYGANOV *pours himself a glass of wine.*

I'm no longer at home with them—I don't understand them—

TSYGANOV (*to* NADEZHDA). To be in your company, my dear, is both pleasant and frightening, like looking over a precipice—

NADEZHDA. You drink much too much—

KATYA. Have you made up?

CHERKUN. Don't tell her, Anna. Let her die of curiosity.

KATYA. But I see myself— Oh, if you were my husband—I'd hold you like this! (*Clenches her fist.*)

CHERKUN. Don't you try to scare me—

ANNA. You're a darling—

MONAKHOV *comes walking along, partly obscured by the trees.*

TSYGANOV. The thing that nettles me is that you're immune to the poison I'd like to inject into you. Such a pity!

ANNA (*abruptly*). Let's get away from here, Katya. (*Leads her away by the arm.*)

KATYA. All right, but not into the house! To the arbor—

CHERKUN (*smiling as he starts for the house*). You conduct your affairs much too openly, Sergey—

TSYGANOV. The world is welcome to admire them if it chooses—

NADEZHDA (*pensively*). George—it's such a pleasant name— What do you want, Mavriky?

MONAKHOV (*coming over and nodding at the table*). Just this—

NADEZHDA. It's not nice of you always to stay right in front of me—

MONAKHOV (*gently*). What's bothering you? A bellyache again? Or is it a corn?

NADEZHDA. Do you understand? He says these rude and nasty things to drive men away from me—

TSYGANOV. Does he? An interesting method.

NADEZHDA (*sincerely and simply*). If you only knew what a disgusting man he is. One day he says I have bad breath—

MONAKHOV (*alarmed*). No, no, Nadya. To whom did I ever say that?

NADEZHDA (*advancing on him*). Shall I remind you? I will—

MONAKHOV (*retreating*). Now, Nadya. Now, really—I was only joking—

They disappear among the trees. TSYGANOV, *looking tired and spent, seats himself in an armchair.* DROBYAZGIN *and* GRISHA *walk up to the table.*

DROBYAZGIN. Sergey Nikolayevich, I want to ask you a question: What are the secret vices?

TSYGANOV. That I am not going to tell you, my friend. I prefer to see you with all your vices out in the open. That way it's more impressive and more beautiful.

DROBYAZGIN. Are there secret virtues too?

TSYGANOV. They always seem to be that—I've never seen them out in the open.

GRISHA. What's the name of that green stuff you gave me that first day—remember?

TSYGANOV. Chartreuse, my boy—

GRISHA *repeats the name to himself and smiles.* MATVEY *goes through the garden lighting the lanterns.*

DROBYAZGIN. And who is the wisest of the wise men, Sergey Nikolayevich?

TSYGANOV. On this subject the history of philosophy relates the following: There lived three wise men. The first argued that the world is thought. The second held the opposite view—I don't remember exactly what it was. But I know definitely that the third seduced the wife of the first, stole the manuscript of the second, published it under his own name, and was crowned with laurels—

GRISHA (*with delight*). Ho! That's clever!

DROBYAZGIN (*at a loss what to say*). Y-yes— He certainly put one over.

TSYGANOV. And now, my friends, let's have a drink. Long live youth! It is but late that man realizes how beautiful it is to be young!

LYDIA *appears with a flower in her hand. Stopping some distance back, she regards the drinking men with a disdainful look.*

DROBYAZGIN (*reflectively*). I suppose, Sergey Nikolayevich, people will always steal?

TSYGANOV. They will, my friend, they will. At least until the day when some man steals everything—you understand?—everything. Then there will be nothing left to steal, and people will be obliged to be honest.

GRISHA (*laughing*). They will all walk naked—

LYDIA. Serge, darling!

TSYGANOV. At your command, my dear.

DROBYAZGIN *and* GRISHA *respectfully step aside and withdraw as she comes forward.*

LYDIA. Why do you encourage them to do that?

TSYGANOV. It gives me pleasure, you know, to debauch these two baby pigs a little. Who knows, vice may make them more like human beings.

LYDIA. Serge Tsyganov, epicure and society lion, only recently the arbiter of fashion, has a drinking bout—with whom?

TSYGANOV. And is in love with the wife of a revenue collector. Yes, yes, the earth turns badly, something is out of joint in the harmony of the universe—

LYDIA. Seriously, what's wrong with you?

TSYGANOV (*quietly*). Ah, what a woman—confound it!

LYDIA. Are you fooling?

TSYGANOV. I am not—

BOGAYESKAYA (*off stage*). Sergey Nikolayevich!

TSYGANOV. I'm coming. Are you coming too?

LYDIA. No. You're a depressing sight—all of you, I must say. I feel like going away from here.

TSYGANOV. Because of somebody's coming here?

LYDIA. Why be vulgar with me too?

TSYGANOV *shrugs and moves toward the house.* LYDIA, *singing in a low voice, starts right, but* ANNA *hurries forward and intercepts her.*

ANNA. Did you receive my note?

LYDIA. Why did you write it?

ANNA. Did I offend you?

LYDIA. You are humiliating yourself—I think—

ANNA. Of what importance is that when one loves?

LYDIA. You have something to say to me?

ANNA (*wearily and anxiously*). Yes, I have. Don't despise me—I loathe myself at this moment. I have nowhere else to go—you understand?—nowhere. Life is so vast. I can live only near him—

LYDIA (*coldly*). Why must I know this?

ANNA. Don't speak like that. Those who are strong should be kind —I want to ask you a question, and I can't. You know what I want to ask you?

LYDIA. Yes. I think I do. Do I love your husband? Is that it? No. I don't love him—

GRISHA *cautiously approaches the table, snatches a bottle of wine, and disappears.*

ANNA. You don't? (*Grasps* LYDIA's *arm.*) And he? Does he love you? Tell me!

LYDIA. I don't know—I don't think he does—

ANNA (*wearily*). How can you help knowing?

LYDIA. We're friends. We talk about many things—

ANNA (*proudly*). Ah! Now I shall be able to talk about many things myself.

LYDIA (*smiling*). That'll be fine!

ANNA. I'm a woman. I love him. I want to be with him—

LYDIA. May I go?

ANNA (*sincerely*). You despise me? But I can't live without him—

LYDIA. You will forgive me, but I think your love—such love bears too hard on him—

ANNA. He's strong. He's very strong.

LYDIA. Good-by. (*She walks off.*)

ANNA. Don't despise me— Oh, well, it makes no difference. O Lord, help me—help me!

Enter the CHIEF OF POLICE *and* PRITYKIN, *both visibly under the influence of drink. Noticing their condition,* ANNA *hastily leaves.*

CHIEF OF POLICE. Imagine, Arkhip, that you are a Chief of Police and it's time for you to get married. But marry whom? That's the question.

PRITYKIN. If you ask me, I'd marry a rich woman every time.

CHIEF OF POLICE. That goes without saying! But if they are both rich—Nadezhda as well as Lydia Pavlovna. What then?

PRITYKIN. I'd choose Lydia Pavlovna.

CHIEF OF POLICE. H'm—why would you?

PRITYKIN. Because Nadezhda is already married. By the way, that student—he is, you know—

CHIEF OF POLICE. The devil with him! He's just a whelp. You say she's married—h'm—that's true. But she can become a widow—

PRITYKIN. Any woman can become that—

CHIEF OF POLICE (*startled*). Precisely—any woman! God! That means we'll all die—you understand?

PRITYKIN. We can do nothing about that—we all have to take it lying down—

CHIEF OF POLICE. That's just the word for it—lying down. You lie down and you stay down—

PRITYKIN. You should hear what that fellow says. It's really terrible—

CHIEF OF POLICE (*pensively*). Other men go out hunting—play cards. But you lie stretched out—and that's the end of it.

PRITYKIN. You should take note of this. He says the people are bled white—

CHIEF OF POLICE. Nonsense! DROBYAZGIN *rushes in.*

PRITYKIN. No—he's a vicious character!

DROBYAZGIN. Yakov Alexeyevich, please come. The Doctor socked Monakhov on the nose!

CHIEF OF POLICE. What's that? Why?

DROBYAZGIN. I don't know—

The three of them go quickly into the house. DUNKA'S HUSBAND, *in tattered clothes and looking wild from constant drinking, appears among the trees. Enter* CHERKUN *leading the* DOCTOR *by the arm and followed some distance behind by* NADEZHDA *and, after her,* STYOPA.

CHERKUN. You'll leave this place at once—

DOCTOR (*bellowing*). Who are you? You have corrupted everybody here—

CHERKUN (*quietly*). Shut up! You ought to be ashamed of yourself—

DOCTOR. You and Tsyganov are like a pair of vultures. But I'm not carrion for you. You won't tear me to pieces as you did Redozubov. Who are you, I ask you?

CHERKUN. Come on—come on! (*Escorts the* DOCTOR *off.*)

NADEZHDA (*to* STYOPA, *with an expression of joy*). Did you see how he handled him? Isn't he handsome and brave? And how simply he did it! Just grabbed him and led him away— (*Follows* CHERKUN.)

STYOPA (*shouts*). Yegor Petrovich! (*Sees her father. This frightens and angers her.*) You here again! Why? What do you want?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. I'm your father, Styopa—am I not? Then you must come to me—

STYOPA. I don't want to! Go away! I won't go to you!

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. Then I'll get you through the police—

STYOPA. Into the grave—that's where I'll go—

CHERKUN, NADEZHDA, ANNA, LYDIA, *and* TSYGANOV *appear.* Did you hear me? You're not my father—you're my plague—

CHERKUN. You're back again? What do you want?

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. I'm after her—to take her away—

STYOPA. He's after my soul—that's what he's after—

ANNA. Go into the house, Styopa.

CHERKUN. You'd better clear out of here.

DUNKA'S HUSBAND. If you've taken away my daughter—then give me something—a ruble—

STYOPA (*she snatches some money out of her pocket and throwing it at her father runs in*). There! Take it! Choke on it!

CHERKUN. Look here—if you ever—

NADEZHDA. Oh, why do you talk to him?

CHERKUN. Never you mind, Nadezhda Polikarpovna—

NADEZHDA. But you mustn't talk to a man like that. (*To* DUNKA'S

HUSBAND.) You go away! Tomorrow I'll tell the Chief of Police to have you annihilated—

DUNKA'S HUSBAND (*picking up the money*). Nobody can do anything to me—I'm not afraid— (*Goes out.*)

TSYGANOV. A wonderful man, isn't he? Keeps growing—

LYDIA. He realizes his power—the power of weakness—

ANNA. You always give him money, Sergey Nikolayevich—you shouldn't.

TSYGANOV. Don't worry. That won't ruin me—

NADEZHDA (*to* CHERKUN). This has been such a hard day for you—one unpleasantness after another—

ANNA (*involuntarily, like an echo*). A hard day— Are you tired, Yegor?

CHERKUN. Well—I don't know what to do to make that man stop bothering his daughter. It irritates me.

NADEZHDA. You don't have to do anything. I'll see to that. Only don't excite yourself—

TSYGANOV. My dear, if anybody is excited it's your husband, I think—

NADEZHDA (*as if surprised*). He?

CHERKUN (*with sudden bitterness*). He's like a mud puddle you step in—this husband of yours—

ANNA (*in a low voice, startled*). Yegor—how can you?

TSYGANOV (*smiling*). You're exaggerating, George—

CHERKUN (*to* NADEZHDA). I'm surprised you're not ashamed to put up with such a swine!

NADEZHDA (*almost gasping with joy*). Oh, how you said that! How true it is—how stern! (*To* TSYGANOV.) There's somebody who's terrifying—there's a man for you!

ANNA (*to* LYDIA, *anxiously*). Good heavens! Isn't she—strange? Don't you think so?

LYDIA. I do. We'd better go.

NADEZHDA. I'm not strange. I admire manly strength—

CHERKUN (*embarrassed*). Now that's something I don't understand. I'm going for a walk—

NADEZHDA. I'll go with you— (*They move off together.*)

ANNA (*to* TSYGANOV *anxiously*). Is she just being amusing? Of course, she's very nice, only she has no manners, isn't that so?

TSYGANOV (*to* ANNA). You need a rest after your journey. It's too noisy here—too much going on—

ANNA. Yes—I'll go in. But she is—such a strange woman—

Hastily starts toward the house. TSYGANOV *lights a cigarette, smiling. Drunken voices and laughter are heard*—MONAKHOV, DROBYAZGIN, *and* GRISHA *approaching.*

LYDIA (*disdainfully*). All this is revolting. This woman, too—both women—what sorry creatures. What makes you laugh?

TSYGANOV. What if she suddenly found her hero? Eh?

LYDIA (*after a pause*). No, that's hardly probable.

TSYGANOV (*with a laugh*). What's improbable about it?

MONAKHOV. He hit me? Let him—I don't care. But I'm alive, and he'll soon be done for.

LYDIA. The drunks are coming. I'm off.

TSYGANOV. So am I.

GRISHA (*with conviction*). I can also—sock a man—just like that!

LYDIA. But why—why does he get mixed up with this trash?

TSYGANOV. This is nature in its elemental state, my dear—it sucks you in—it draws you like a magnet. The hunger instinct barely concealed by the old rags of romance—

They walk off. MONAKHOV *winks to his companions and shakes a threatening finger in the direction of* TSYGANOV.

DROBYAZGIN. Why? He's very intelligent. I really think so.

MONAKHOV. What is intelligence?

He laughs and is seconded by DROBYAZGIN *and* GRISHA.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

A large comfortable sitting room. At left, a door to the entrance hall, and two windows; right, a door to ANNA'S *room, and another to* YEGOR'S. *At rear, a door leads to the drawing room. In an alcove between the projecting wall of the drawing room and the Dutch stove in the right corner stands a sofa.*

It is evening. The lamps are lit.

TSYGANOV *is lying on the sofa, smoking. There is a piano between the doors, right.* ANNA *is playing on it very gently. At a table in the middle of the room,* BOGAYEVSKAYA *is engaged in a game of patience. Through the open door of* CHERKUN'S *room,* STEPAN *can be glimpsed clicking counters on an abacus.* CHERKUN *is pacing the sitting room, absorbed in thought. Now and then he stops before the windows and peers into the darkness.*

BOGAYEVSKAYA. It's rather chilly.

ANNA. Shall I bring you a shawl?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Lydia has gone to fetch one.

TSYGANOV. Stop your clicking, young man.

STEPAN. I will—as soon as I catch him—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Whom are you trying to catch?

STEPAN. Merchant Pritykin—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Does he cheat?

STEPAN. Industriously.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Yes, a merchant will be a merchant—he cheats even when in love—

TSYGANOV. That's common to men of all classes—strictly speaking, I'm opposed to exposing swindlers—that only sharpens their technique. Why do you keep walking about, George? Are you waiting for anybody?

CHERKUN (*after a pause*). Just walking— Why?

TSYGANOV. I have no further questions, as district attorneys say. What idiotic weather!

ANNA. He's wrought up from the argument—

CHERKUN (*dryly*). How do you know?

ANNA. I think—when people disagree—it irritates one—

CHERKUN (*sarcastically*). Does it? I congratulate you—on your extremely original observation.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Well, it was an interesting argument. I didn't understand a thing—but it was interesting!

CHERKUN. Lydia Pavlovna is too rigid in her reasoning.

TSYGANOV. That from you, of all people!

BOGAYEVSKAYA. It will be dull when you go—awfully dull!

TSYGANOV. Come with us. What is there for you to do here?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. And there? There's nothing for me to do anywhere, my dear man. I've been doing nothing all my life—

TSYGANOV. Have you done nothing that was a mistake?

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*shuffling cards*). No, not even a mistake. It hasn't come out, Anna Fyodorovna.

ANNA (*sadly*). It hasn't? Pity. I wanted it so much to come out—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. We'll question fate once more—

STEPAN (*at the door—with jocular solemnity*). You may not do violence to fate—

CHERKUN. It's fate that does violence to humans.

STEPAN. Especially to the greedy ones—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. You go on with your clicking—

Enter LYDIA *carrying a shawl.*

TSYGANOV. So long as fate hasn't clicked you off—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Thank you, Lydia dear. Have you heard—Arkhip Pritykin is romancing with Maria Vesyolkina?

LYDIA. How very interesting, Auntie.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Well—it's amusing!

TSYGANOV. Nothing seems to interest you, my dear, except riding. You do lead a strange life—gallop over the fields in all kinds of weather—and that's all! You've changed amazingly—

LYDIA. For the worse?

TSYGANOV. Of course. All people from childhood on move only in that direction.

LYDIA. Then what's so amazing about it?

TSYGANOV. I expected to see you grow up into a beautiful, poisonous flower in the fields of vice—and you—what are you? What do you seek? What do you want?

LYDIA. You'll know when I find it.

STEPAN. You're looking for it in the wrong place!

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Perhaps my presence constrains your eloquence, my good man?

TSYGANOV. Not at all. Why?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. That's fine. Some people, you see, feel shy to say vulgar things to my face—not to offend a respectable old lady, so to speak—

LYDIA. You're too straitlaced, Auntie— The people I mix with say much worse things—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Worse still? Then I apologize. I've lost all cultural pretenses here.

TSYGANOV. Come, come! *Enter* KATYA, *in a great hurry.*

STEPAN (*bursting out of* CHERKUN'S *room*). Well? How is it?

KATYA. I'm going—

STEPAN (*approvingly*). Bravo! Smart girl!

KATYA (*walks over to* ANNA). It's awful. He cries—my father. He's so pitiful—

STEPAN. This is his retribution. He's crushed people all his life—

KATYA (*stamping her foot*). Don't talk like that! How dare you? It's none of your business—

ANNA. Now calm yourself—it'll be all right—

TSYGANOV. It's certainly his business—he's carried you off—

KATYA. Don't talk nonsense! Nobody's carried me off—I've done it myself. But I'm sorry for Father—I love him. I know he's rough and cruel. But everybody is. Everybody is rough and cruel. And you, Stepan Danilovich—you are too—

STEPAN (*flaring up, but with a smile*). It's possible—what of it? Life is so arranged that cruelty is necessary—

KATYA. I hate your sneer. Shut up!

ANNA. Do calm yourself— Come to my room! (*Leads her off.*)

CHERKUN (*smiling*). She's a sweet little tigress.

TSYGANOV. Young man! You'll have a shrew of a wife!

STYOPA (*entering*). Stepan Danilovich—

STEPAN (*disdainfully to* TSYGANOV). Do you always have to be rude?

CHERKUN (*screwing up his face*). Gentlemen!

STYOPA. Stepan Danilovich, Matvey wants to see you—

Turning abruptly, STEPAN *exits to the entrance hall, followed by* STYOPA.

TSYGANOV. A pugnacious young man. Why do you smile, Lydia Pavlovna?

LYDIA. They make a fine pair—

CHERKUN. They are nice—

LYDIA. A beautiful life lies ahead of them—

TSYGANOV. But, most probably, a hungry one—

LYDIA. I like the young man. He has something vital in him—

TSYGANOV. His superior way of laughing practically denies your existence.

LYDIA. It denies everybody's.

STEPAN *returns, smiling. On his heels comes* MATVEY, *wearing a new peasant coat.* MATVEY *seems ill at ease and whispers something to* STEPAN.

STEPAN. Oh, no sir, you will tell them yourself—

CHERKUN. What is it? What do you want, Matvey?

MATVEY (*embarrassed*). Well—I want to get married—

TSYGANOV. An original idea. How did you come by it?

MATVEY. Oh, it's time. I'm twenty-three—

CHERKUN. Well? Go on—

MATVEY. Please help me, Yegor Petrovich! I'll repay the favor! Coming from peasants I know all their sore spots—and they'll never get the better of me—

STEPAN. There's your education—a man of true public spirit—

KATYA *and* ANNA *enter and stand by the piano.*

CHERKUN (*unenthusiastically*). How can I help you?

MATVEY. You see—I've chosen Styopa, but she refuses— I won't marry you, she says, and she won't budge. She's a modest girl and won't misbehave, I expect. I know I can't make her fear me— So I want to ask you and the mistress to frighten her—

CHERKUN. What's that for?

MATVEY. To make her marry me—or else, you tell her, you'll turn her over to her father. She's afraid of him like death. Meantime, I've already given him half a ruble so that he'll push her back to me—

KATYA (*aghast*). Oh, what a scoundrel!

MATVEY (*starting*). What do you say?

CHERKUN (*to* STEPAN, *dryly*). Pay him his wages.

MATVEY (*astounded*). Pay me off? But what—what did I do?

STEPAN. Think it over, brother.

CHERKUN. Go.

MATVEY (*falling to his knees*). Yegor Petrovich—

CHERKUN (*sharply*). Get up!

MATVEY (*springing to his feet*). Now, Sergey Nikolayevich, what did I do?

KATYA (*triumphantly*). Aha! Singing a different tune now?

MATVEY (*plaintively*). I've done nothing wrong! Oh, Stepan Danilovich! You've put me in this position!

TSYGANOV. Go along now. Later, it's possible—

CHERKUN (*calmly*). Nothing is possible—

MATVEY (*as he goes out with* STEPAN). It's all wrong, sir. It's not fair. Suddenly, for no reason—

TSYGANOV (*to* CHERKUN). I don't think you acted like a Solomon—no! He's already stolen enough money—what's the good of firing him then? He's no fool—and in due time he will be a village kulak anyway. Clever people are always crooks—

STYOPA (*rushes in and throws herself at* CHERKUN'S *feet*). May God reward you, Yegor Petrovich—

CHERKUN. Oh, for heaven's sake! Get up at once!

STYOPA (*rises*). I shook with fear thinking that you'd hand me over to him.

KATYA. She's stupid—

ANNA. Nobody can hand you over to anybody, Styopa.

STYOPA (*still frightened*). But I'm alone! Anything can be done to me— And they will take me—Father and that one—they will!

ANNA (*walks over to* STYOPA). Calm yourself, Styopa.

STYOPA. I'll go into a convent—they won't get me there. Or could they?

ANNA (*leading* STYOPA *into her room*). Come along—

KATYA (*to* CHERKUN). I like the way you did that. Just how it should be done—one, two—a bump on the head and no pleasant dreams—

CHERKUN. At last I have been honored with your praise—

TSYGANOV (*yawning slightly*). For which he has waited so long and anxiously—

CHERKUN. But when I taught your papa a lesson in this same way—one, two—

KATYA. Stop it! Father—that's different—

Runs into ANNA'S *room.* ANNA *emerges just as* KATYA *is going in and pours a glass of water.*

ANNA. You acted splendidly, Yegor—

CHERKUN (*making a wry face*). Stop it, Anna—

TSYGANOV. That's right, George. Modesty, of all things, befits a hero best—

LYDIA. No, Uncle Serge—observe how quickly reward follows the deed!

ANNA (*going back to her room*). You people never tire of ridiculing everything—

CHERKUN (*sullenly*). You seem to think I'm incapable of seeing all this in its true light.

LYDIA (*listening*). The doorbell?

CHERKUN (*quickly*). Yes. I'll answer it. (*Goes out.*)

TSYGANOV. I bet I know the party he hopes to meet—

LYDIA. Why are you so silent, Auntie?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. One can't think and talk at the same time— I'm stuck here—

TSYGANOV. I know whom he's waiting for—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. A fifth queen has popped up from somewhere and a nine is missing—

LYDIA. Here's the nine—and that's not a queen, it's a jack—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. So it is! My goodness! It's my eyes— Well, then—jack—

TSYGANOV (*singing*). Yes, I know—yes, I know—

LYDIA. That isn't clever, Uncle Serge. Are you going to stay here long, Auntie? It's very bad for you to be sitting so long—

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*preoccupied with her cards*). Wait—I'll be through in a moment—I won't be long—

Enter CHERKUN *and the* CHIEF OF POLICE.

CHERKUN. You haven't found him yet?

CHIEF OF POLICE (*glumly*). No. God only knows where he's gone— Where can one flee to from this town? Good evening, Lydia Pavlovna. How are you, my dear Tatyana Nikolayevna? (*Silently he shakes hands with* TSYGANOV.)

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*without looking at him*). Well, how's your Treasury clerk?

CHIEF OF POLICE. No trace of him, the scoundrel. With all this ceaseless searching my throat is parched!

TSYGANOV. That can be easily remedied— (*Pours wine.*) How much did he steal?

CHIEF OF POLICE. Four hundred and sixty-three rubles and thirty-two kopecks. The blockhead! He should have grabbed it all—there was about eight thousand there— The idiot took just one bundle! And after all—suppose you do steal something—what of it? It's nothing unusual—it's no murder! Then come and confess. You get a commutation of sentence for that. But the young fool goes into hiding, if you please—and nine men have to search for him.

CHERKUN. Young fool is right!

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*without looking up*). And he stole like a beggar—down to kopeks—

TSYGANOV. Bravo, Tatyana Nikolayevna!

LYDIA *and* CHERKUN *laugh.*

CHIEF OF POLICE (*glancing at his watch*). Well, I've dropped in, Sergey Nikolayevich, to tell you all this—and so forth— You saw him on the day of the crime—so, I'm sorry, you'll have to—

TSYGANOV (*seriously*). I understand, I'm suspected of being an accomplice—

CHIEF OF POLICE. What? Oh! (*Laughs.*) You will have your little joke! Ah, how I'd love to stay with you—but I have to go—some nincompoop beat up his wife—

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*as before*). Till she was dead?

CHIEF OF POLICE. I believe so. And where's Pritykin? He came with me. We thought we might have a game of cards—

CHERKUN. He's busy with Stepan Danilovich—

CHIEF OF POLICE (*sadly*). But on the way here a policeman reported this beating— Oh, yes. This student of yours—I wish you'd tell him—

to restrain himself. There are rumors about him—that he meets factory workers— Now, why does he do it? We have that pious gentleman in our town—Pavlin Golovastikov, regular vitriol! We're afraid of him ourselves. He knows everything—even your dreams. And I don't want to resort to certain measures—I don't like unpleasantnesses—

TSYGANOV. All right. I'll see to that. Unpleasantnesses are no pleasure to anybody.

CHIEF OF POLICE. Just so. Well—good-by all! You're a good fellow, Sergey Nikolayevich—I really mean it.

TSYGANOV (*seeing him out*). Despite being the suspected accomplice of Porphiry Drobyazgin who stole thirty-two kopecks from the government?

The CHIEF OF POLICE *laughs. From the hall are heard* PRITYKIN'S *sugary voice and the caustic exclamations of* STEPAN.

CHERKUN (*to* LYDIA, *in a low tone*). What do you say to that?

LYDIA. You mean, about Stepan Danilovich?

CHERKUN. No, that's natural. But this Drobyazgin—confound him! What can be done for him? To tell the truth, it's Sergey—do you understand me?

LYDIA (*smiling*). You'll soon be quite a respectable citizen—really!

CHERKUN (*seriously*). He corrupted the boy—no doubt of it. Is that so funny?

LYDIA. Do you remember the time when you wanted to turn the town upside down?

CHERKUN. Did I? Well, suppose I did. What about it? What do you want to say?

LYDIA. I'm only reminding you— You said you'd make a point of introducing new ideas, new tastes to this town. Uncle Serge said nothing, but look how many dead people are decomposing thanks to him—

CHERKUN. Yes, I understand you—go on—

LYDIA. Well, I don't see any of the new life you were supposed to bring here—but I think you yourself have become a bit tarnished—

STEPAN (*from the hall*). Will you come here for a minute, Yegor Petrovich?

PRITYKIN (*protesting*). Please, Yegor Petrovich!

CHERKUN (*leaving*). I'll answer you—later—

LYDIA. Oh, do stop playing, Auntie. Let's go home, shall we?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. I'm quite at home here—wait. Everything is so confused, so muddled, so entangled here— This, my dear, is the most difficult patience—it's called "two necessities"—

LYDIA. Well, I'm going— (*She walks into the hall and up the steps.*)

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*bending over the cards*). You're going—you're going— But what shall I do? Well, I don't know what I can do. (*Raises her head and looks about.*) Oh, they've all gone—and I'm alone. Well, no matter. (*Gazes at the cards, and suddenly mixes them all up.*)

Tatyana, my dear, you'll soon be dead— Yes, you'll soon be dead, old fool, you will—

She rises and starts toward the hall. At the door stands PRITYKINA, *a kerchief over her head, her face, as usual, flabby, lacking make-up—altogether a sorry sight.* BOGAYEVSKAYA *steps back from her.*

Who's that? What do you want?

PRITYKINA (*quietly*). It's me—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Is it you, Pelageya?

PRITYKINA. Yes—it's me. Is my husband here?

BOGAYEVSKAYA. I think so. What's the trouble?

PRITYKINA (*weeping quietly*). He's giving me up—leaving me. He spends every evening at the Vesyolkins' playing cards with the father —and hoping to seduce his daughter—

BOGAYEVSKAYA. Now, don't talk like a fool—and don't tell fibs— A seducer, indeed. People will laugh at you. Come upstairs with me—

PRITYKINA. He beats me! He says, you've ruined my life, you scarecrow, you old witch, he says. Get out, he says. And where can I go? All my property's been transferred to him—it's all in his hands— What am I to do, dear?

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*going out*). Come up—don't make a fuss—

PRITYKINA (*following her*). I'm coming. But please advise me what to do about him. How shall I live now? Oh! I hear his voice. Let me walk ahead, dear—

They disappear. Almost at the same time a door is heard being thrown open with a bang and from the hall comes PRITYKIN, *looking agitated, followed by* CHERKUN *and* STEPAN.

PRITYKIN. You can't do this to me, Mr. Student. I'm a well-known man here—and I'm going to be the mayor soon—I am. And you, if I may say so, you're just a young man—and that's all.

CHERKUN. This is no place to shout, please.

PRITYKIN. But this is a good enough place to call me a crook? Why am I a crook? Why, I would like to know?

STEPAN (*with a snicker*). Here's the proof—the figures—

PRITYKIN. Figures? You can write any figures you please. That's no proof—

STEPAN. But that's just how you wrote your figures—anything you pleased— Explain to me, for instance, where you got these six thousand three hundred rubles—

PRITYKIN. Yegor Petrovich, permit me not to give explanations— let it remain strictly between us. Sergey Nikolayevich trusts me. But Mr. Lukin—I really don't know what he wants—

STEPAN. I want to catch you cheating—

PRITYKIN. Cheating? No, I won't put up with talk like that—

CHERKUN (*dryly*). We'll leave it till tomorrow—

PRITYKIN. No, I can't leave it like this! I am an honest man. Sergey

Nikolayevich knows I am. My accounts are right—ask him—he knows—

CHERKUN (*incensed, in a quiet voice*). Shut up! Come here—will you? (*He leads* PRITYKIN *toward his room.*)

PRITYKIN. Now, really—you can't push me this way—

CHERKUN shoves him in, goes in himself, and slams the door. STEPAN tosses the abacus on the table, puts his hands in his pockets, and walks off.

STEPAN (*speaking through clenched teeth*). Oh, the crooks!

STYOPA comes out of ANNA'S room with a book in her hand and continues into the drawing room. ANNA'S voice is heard reading aloud. There are sounds and footsteps in the hall. Enter TSYGANOV *and* MONAKHOVA.

TSYGANOV. I was out on the veranda alone. In the autumn it gives you a nice feeling sometimes to gaze at the sky—

NADEZHDA. Where's everybody?

TSYGANOV (*ironically*). The person you want will come when he hears your voice, but he will give you nothing— In the autumn, clouds—heavy black clouds—sweep over the sky—

NADEZHDA. I don't like black. The most important and impressive color is red. Queens and various aristocratic ladies wear red.

TSYGANOV. I haven't seen it, but I imagine it's very beautiful— Well, I shall soon go away, my dear—

NADEZHDA (*sitting on the sofa*). Somebody else will go away with you—

TSYGANOV. Somebody else? What do you mean? Have you made up your mind?

NADEZHDA. About what?

TSYGANOV (*in a low voice*). Going away with me? To Paris? Oh, Paris—just picture it! Marquises, counts, barons, all in red! And you'll have everything you desire—I'll give you everything!

NADEZHDA (*calmly*). It's really quite rude of you, Sergey Nikolayevich! As if I were that kind of woman—

TSYGANOV. You're marvelous! You're extraordinary! You're awe-inspiring! And I love you—believe me—love you like a youth— You are—a power! And what happiness, what pleasures are in store for you!

NADEZHDA. Sergey Nikolayevich, why do you say all this? And it's quite impossible for you to love like a youth when you will soon be fifty, and in two years' time probably quite bald. And this traveling to Paris—how can it be if it's impossible for me to love you? You're a very interesting man, but quite middle-aged, and not my match. It quite hurts me, excuse me saying so, to hear your intentions of this character—

TSYGANOV (*almost with a groan*). Oh, curses! Well—let's get married then. I'll arrange to get you a divorce from your husband and—

NADEZHDA. That won't make a bit of difference. The important thing is the man and not all sorts of other considerations. Don't you see? No, please leave me alone— You've taught me many things—I've become more clever and more brave—

TSYGANOV (*recovering his composure*). Very well then— Let's bury this, my friend. I give you my word—that was my last attempt—I have no time for another—nor strength—no strength at all!

NADEZHDA. Now that's fine. You're an intelligent man—you understand that one cannot buy strength in a corner store—

TSYGANOV (*in his usual manner*). Oh, yes, you're right about that. It's the same as intelligence which you can't buy even in a department store—

NADEZHDA. Now you see it yourself!

Enter REDOZUBOV *and* PAVLIN. REDOZUBOV *looks considerably aged.*

REDOZUBOV. Hello! My daughter here?

TSYGANOV. I believe she is— (*Knocks on* ANNA's *door.*)

REDOZUBOV (*to* PAVLIN). You see? They are all in pairs— H'm—

ANNA (*at the door*). Oh, Vassily Ivanovich! How are you? Katya!

NADEZHDA. Good evening, Anna Fyodorovna—

ANNA. Oh—it's you?

NADEZHDA. Yes.

KATYA (*entering, to her father*). What's brought you here?

PAVLIN (*quietly*). He's uneasy about you—

ANNA (*calling out*). Styopa! (*To* NADEZHDA.) Will you have some tea? You like tea, don't you?

NADEZHDA. Thank you— *Enter* STYOPA.

ANNA (*to* STYOPA). Bring tea, Styopa, will you? I won't be a moment. (*Returns to her room.*)

TSYGANOV. And cognac, too, Styopa. (*Walks over to* NADEZHDA *and speaks to her in low tones.*)

REDOZUBOV. Who are you with? Only her?

KATYA. Keep quiet. Such stupid questions!

REDOZUBOV. Come home, Katya. These are your last days here—you should spend them at home—don't you think?

KATYA. All right. Wait, I'll be back in a minute. (*She goes quickly into* ANNA's *room.*)

REDOZUBOV (*taking a seat—to* PAVLIN). Did you see? She's quite a stranger now. These people have won my daughter away—made my son into a drunkard—ruined my life—and nothing happens to them!

PAVLIN (*softly*). Don't worry! Wait.

REDOZUBOV. What is there to wait for? Where can I make a complaint?

PAVLIN. They've bought off the Chief of Police, but nobody can buy God— You understand?

REDOZUBOV. They've taken Pritykin to their bosoms, but mangled

me— Now, my daughter, too. She may be in there, with the student —and I wait. No, not I! (*Jumps to his feet and yells.*) Katya!

NADEZHDA. Oh! What's happened?

TSYGANOV. What's the matter with you, my good man?

Enter CHERKUN, *followed by* PRITYKIN, *the latter with a pained expression on his face, like that of a man with a toothache.* KATYA *and* ANNA *rush in.*

KATYA. What are you hollering for?

REDOZUBOV. Out of here!

CHERKUN. Look here—this is not a market place—

REDOZUBOV. Come—beat me—finish me off! Bandit! Beat me—

KATYA. Father! Oh, good God!

CHERKUN. Now listen, you old man—

REDOZUBOV. Shut up! Don't talk to me—you Freemason! Katerina, go home! Well, Arkhip—rejoicing, are you? Lickspittle!

PRITYKIN. I'm not to blame, Vassily Ivanovich!

REDOZUBOV. You're not! You married a rich old fool and robbed her—now you keep women—want to be mayor—you—parasite!

CHERKUN. Now, look—if you want to curse and swear go somewhere else—

KATYA (*shouting*). Go—or they'll put you out. Can't you see? It'll hurt me—it'll make me ashamed of you—how shall I ever be able to see them again? I'll hate you if they put you out—

REDOZUBOV. What did you say?

ANNA. Look—she feels sorry for you—she's crying—she loves you!

REDOZUBOV. If she loves me—why does she leave me?

KATYA. Come—come, for God's sake, please.

She leads her father into the hall. With a peculiar motion, PAVLIN *slips to the door and stops there, listening.*

CHERKUN. You'd better go, too, Arkhip Fomich— There's nothing more we can say.

PRITYKIN (*sighing*). All right—I'll go. And by the way, Stepan Danilovich will have cause to remember me for this. He's a local man and so am I. So. (*He leaves.*)

ANNA. Oh, God—how strange all this is—

During the foregoing NADEZHDA *has been watching* CHERKUN *from her corner, with an odd, set smile on her face.* TSYGANOV, *puffing on his cigar and waggling his mustache, lets his eyes rove over the scene.* STYOPA, *as she makes tea, timidly casts glances full of hatred at* PAVLIN. ANNA *looks at* NADEZHDA *and, on impulse, makes a movement toward her, but turning abruptly walks into her room.*

TSYGANOV (*to* CHERKUN). Have you balanced accounts with him?

CHERKUN. Yes. I want to have a talk with you. Oh, Nadezhda Polikarpovna, you've come? And I didn't know you were here. Well, how are you? It's a nasty day, isn't it?

TSYGANOV. Evidently we are not going to have our talk now—

CHERKUN. Naturally not. But why are you sitting in a corner and in the dark? Let's go into the drawing room—

NADEZHDA. With pleasure— And I was waiting here till you noticed me—

They exit to the drawing room, whence the sound of their quiet conversation can be heard.

TSYGANOV (*to* PAVLIN). Oh, you still here? Well, what have you on your mind?

PAVLIN. The old man has gone to pieces. He should have allowed himself to be turned out. Certainly, after such treatment of her father, Katya's pride would not have allowed her to visit this house.

STYOPA (*quietly*). Oh, the snake!

TSYGANOV (*absorbed in his thoughts, he has not been listening to* PAVLIN). Y-yes. Well, what about it?

PAVLIN. After that one could decide what to do according to circumstances— Permit me to ask you, sir, about my work—have you considered it? (TSYGANOV *stares at him in silence.* PAVLIN *steps back.*) I mean, my manuscript work—have you been good enough to read it?

TSYGANOV. What? Oh, yes— (*Sharply.*) It's utter nonsense, old man—

PAVLIN (*incredulously*). My labor of nine years is utter nonsense?

TSYGANOV (*scornfully*). I'll go and get this philosophy of yours— wait. (*Going into the drawing room.*) Warm me a bottle of red wine, Styopa—

PAVLIN (*quietly*). Well, girl, I saw your father today— (*Leaning with her hands on the table,* STYOPA *fixes her eyes on* PAVLIN.) The wind was blowing in the street, it was drizzling, and there was your father drunk and almost naked, walking along and crying—crying bitterly!

STYOPA (*in a choked voice*). You're lying! Why do you torture me? (*She hurls the samovar damper at him.*) Take this—you devil!—you witch doctor! ANNA *opens the door.*

ANNA. What's that?

PAVLIN (*picking up the damper*). The damper has fallen—by accident—

STYOPA. Order him out! *Enter* TSYGANOV.

TSYGANOV (*to* PAVLIN). Here it is—

STYOPA. Order him out!

ANNA *walks over to her, whispers something.* STYOPA *leaves.* ANNA *stands at the table listening to the conversation in the drawing room, her face twisted with an expression of pain and disgust.*

PAVLIN. There's no call to order me out, girl—I'll go by myself. So you say, sir, it's nonsense?

TSYGANOV. Yes.

PAVLIN. Then, all my nine years' thinking was wrong? My humble

thanks to you, sir. Can it be that you are wrong? Good-by! (*He goes out.*)

TSYGANOV. He's certainly regular vitriol, as the Chief of Police calls him—good heavens, you're not well?

ANNA (*in a whisper*). What is she saying? Listen—

TSYGANOV (*quietly*). I don't permit myself to hear anything under such circumstances—

ANNA. Oh, what she is doing!

TSYGANOV (*in a loud voice*). Aren't you coming, my friends? Tea is ready.

CHERKUN. In a moment.

ANNA (*softly, with an expression of pain*). Do you think I have been eavesdropping? You should be ashamed!

TSYGANOV. No, no! I assure you. Yegor, come here—

ANNA *runs into her room.* CHERKUN *comes to the door.*

CHERKUN. Well? What is it?

TSYGANOV (*quietly*). Come in. Your wife heard something a moment ago and it's disturbed her very much—

CHERKUN (*making a wry face*). Oh, the usual story. Nadezhda Polikarpovna is just playful—that all. She's been telling me how different people declare their love— It's extremely amusing—

He goes back. TSYGANOV *shrugs, touches up his mustache, pours himself a big glass of cognac, and downs it. Then, picking up his hat, he starts for the hall. Before he reaches the door,* MONAKHOV *enters, looking subdued and sad.*

MONAKHOV (*softly*). Good evening.

TSYGANOV. Good evening. Have some cognac?

MONAKHOV. If you please. It's cold. Is my Nadezhda here?

TSYGANOV. Another?

MONAKHOV *nods in silence.* TSYGANOV *whistles a snatch of something.*

MONAKHOV (*quietly*). I've come—to take her home—

TSYGANOV (*smiling*). Shall I call her?

MONAKHOV. No—don't. I'd better have one more—

TSYGANOV (*still with a smile*). Does it make it better?

MONAKHOV. Don't laugh—it's no laughing matter.

TSYGANOV. But what about the bet we had? You remember?

MONAKHOV. Well, you've lost, haven't you?

TSYGANOV. But you're not pleased? Oh, come on. What's the matter? Don't be like that!

MONAKHOV (*weeping*). It hurts. What shall I do now? What can I? Except for her I have nothing—nothing!

TSYGANOV (*suppressing his distaste*). Well, let's go—to my room—or outdoors. Come along, please. Suffer if you have to, but don't make yourself appear ridiculous or ugly—never, my friend!

They go out into the hall. The room is quiet. From the drawing room is heard NADEZHDA'S *low purring voice.*

NADEZHDA. True love grudges nothing, fears nothing—

CHERKUN. Well, we'll drop this subject—you're saying such things today—

He appears at the door, excited. NADEZHDA *is behind him.*

NADEZHDA. There's nothing one can say about love. What I was telling you was the way different heroes declare their sentiments in novels. But love—one must love in silence—

CHERKUN (*mumbling*). In silence? Well—let's have tea, shall we?

NADEZHDA (*quietly*). Are you afraid?

CHERKUN. I? Of what?

NADEZHDA. Me. I never expected that—

CHERKUN. That's enough, really—

NADEZHDA. I never thought you could be afraid—

CHERKUN (*drawing closer to her*). Look out!

NADEZHDA. What should I look for?

CHERKUN (*placing his hands on her shoulders*). You love me? Well, tell me—you love me?

NADEZHDA (*in a low but firm voice*). Yes, the moment I laid eyes on you. My—George! You're mine, George!

She puts her arms around him. He makes a movement to disengage himself. ANNA *enters the room. Her face is wet with tears; in her hand she holds a handkerchief. Seeing her husband and* NADEZHDA *she draws up, like a taut spring.*

ANNA (*quietly*). This is—disgusting!

CHERKUN (*with a drunken smile*). Don't jump at conclusions, Anna. Though it makes no difference!

NADEZHDA. You're right. It makes no difference now!

ANNA (*with revulsion to* NADEZHDA). Oh, you're a beast—a filthy beast!

NADEZHDA (*calmly*). Because I love him?

CHERKUN (*as if coming to*). Wait, Anna, keep quiet—

ANNA. Keep quiet? You have fallen low! I could understand it if it weren't this one—if it were the other one—but this—this animal—

NADEZHDA (*to* CHERKUN). Let's go, George—

CHERKUN. Nadezhda Polikarpovna, look—

There is a disturbance in the hall. In bursts TSYGANOV, *followed by the* DOCTOR *and* MONAKHOV.

TSYGANOV. Stop—stop that idiot!

DOCTOR (*at the door, holding on to the knob and waving a big old revolver at* TSYGANOV). I'll kill you! (*He pulls the trigger, but the revolver jams.*)

TSYGANOV. Ass! You can't even shoot!

CHERKUN (*rushing over to the* DOCTOR). Give it to me!

ANNA AND NADEZHDA (*together*). Keep away! He'll kill you!

DOCTOR (*turning the drum of the revolver*). Curse you! The devil—

NADEZHDA (*wrenching the revolver from the* DOCTOR'S *hand*). You stupid man!

CHERKUN. Have you gone mad?

MONAKHOV. Drop that thing, Nadezhda!

LYDIA (*rushing in*). What's happened?

TSYGANOV (*betraying agitation*). I have enough sins of my own, without answering for other people's. The savage!

ANNA (*to* LYDIA). He kissed her— He kissed her! (*To* MONAKHOV.) Take this woman away— (*To* LYDIA.) They were kissing—

LYDIA (*leading* ANNA *to her room*). Styopa, call Auntie.

DOCTOR. She kissed you?

CHERKUN. Get out of here!

TSYGANOV (*wrapping a handkerchief around his finger*). He's waked up—the idiot!

DOCTOR (*wearily*). Nadezhda dear, whom did you choose?

NADEZHDA (*she has been regarding him all the time with a satisfied smile*). I'm no dear to you—

DOCTOR. Whom did you choose?

NADEZHDA (*pointing at* CHERKUN, *proudly*). Him!

MONAKHOV (*in a parched voice*). Nadya! Nadya! Why did you do it? Nadezhda!

Enter BOGAYEVSKAYA. *Without stopping, she goes into* ANNA'S *room.*

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*on her way*). You've come to this? A brawl?

DOCTOR (*to* TSYGANOV). You, my fine, lordly gentleman! I'm sorry. It appears I made a mistake—I should have gone after him— However, it makes no difference. You're both beasts of prey. I'm sorry I didn't kill you both—I'm sorry.

NADEZHDA (*not unsympathetically*). You! What are you capable of doing?

DOCTOR. You're right. I'm not capable of doing anything. I'm all burned out.

CHERKUN. Well, that's enough, I say.

MONAKHOV. Nadezhda, let's go home!

NADEZHDA (*firmly*). My home is where he is—that's where.

DOCTOR. My heart flamed for four long years—what am I now?

TSYGANOV. Yegor, how long is he going to stand there ranting? Damn it, he tore my nail—

CHERKUN (*to the* DOCTOR). You've got off cheap for your escapade. Go now! That's enough—

DOCTOR (*having recovered himself, simply*). Good-by, Nadezhda! I love you. Forgive me—everything. Good-by. You'll be lost with them —I know you'll be. Good-by. Good-by, you vultures— (*He goes out.*)

TSYGANOV (*to* NADEZHDA). Well, are you satisfied at last? It's just

like a novel—ecstatic love, three unhappy wretches—an attempt to shoot—blood—(*shows his wrapped finger*) grand, isn't it?

NADEZHDA (*obtusely*). What's he going to do now? Kill himself like that other one?

TSYGANOV. I'd shoot myself out of shame—

MONAKHOV (*to* CHERKUN, *quietly*). Give me back my wife—please. I've nothing else—she's everything to me—I've given her all my life—I've stolen money for her—

CHERKUN (*sharply*). By all means—take her!

NADEZHDA (*to* CHERKUN, *astounded*). What did you say? Take me?

CHERKUN (*firmly*). I did. Look, Nadezhda Polikarpovna—I ask you to forgive me—

NADEZHDA. Forgive you what?

CHERKUN. Don't attach any importance to what I did— It was a momentary flash—which you yourself set off—it wasn't love—

NADEZHDA (*in a strained voice*). Speak plainly—so I can understand you.

CHERKUN. I don't love you!

NADEZHDA (*incredulously*). But it's impossible! You kissed me—Nobody ever kissed me—only you!

MONAKHOV. What about me, dear?

NADEZHDA (*in a leaden tone*). Quiet, dead man!

CHERKUN. Let's finish this. You understand me, don't you? Forgive me—if you can. (*He turns to leave.*)

NADEZHDA (*appearing baffled, sadly*). No—no! Just let me sit down—and you, George, sit down beside me—will you? Yegor Petrovich—

CHERKUN. I don't love you—I don't!

He goes into his room. NADEZHDA *slowly sinks onto the sofa. She is stunned.* TSYGANOV, *pleasantly surprised, waggles his mustache.* MONAKHOV, *looking twisted and broken, stands at the door.*

TSYGANOV (*gaily*). What an idiotic town! Everything is topsy-turvy here—the Doctor should cure people—and he injures them—

MONAKHOV. Nadezhda, dear—

NADEZHDA. Ah?

MONAKHOV. Let's go home—

NADEZHDA (*quietly and calmly*). Go alone, dead man—go!

With a sigh MONAKHOV *withdraws into the drawing room.*

TSYGANOV (*in a low voice*). Come to Paris, my dear—eh?

NADEZHDA. He doesn't love me? Is it true?

TSYGANOV. Of course! When one loves, one doesn't—

NADEZHDA. Don't! I know it—

TSYGANOV. So there it is, my joy.

NADEZHDA (*wearily*). But perhaps—he's only afraid?

TSYGANOV (*with a sigh*). What has he to be afraid of?

NADEZHDA. And the Doctor? Do you think he'll kill himself?

TSYGANOV. I doubt it. But suppose he does—what of it? You're used to it—this time it's the Doctor, next time, probably, myself—

NADEZHDA (*shaking her head*). What can he kill himself with? Here's his revolver.

TSYGANOV. He can get another one—

NADEZHDA. They don't sell them here— It's stifling in this room. Oh, I feel oppressed— Let's go out. The veranda will do—we'll get some fresh air— Come—

TSYGANOV. With you I'll go anywhere—even to the roof— You see, I love you—I do!

NADEZHDA. No—don't say such things— (*With deep conviction.*) How can you love me, if he cannot? He! He got frightened. A man like him! No, nobody can love me—nobody—

They go out. STYOPA *runs out of* ANNA'S *room and is followed by* LYDIA. STYOPA *takes something out of the drawer of the bureau. Enter* CHERKUN, *looking sullen and depressed.*

LYDIA. Fifteen drops, Styopa.

STYOPA. I'm so frightened— Lord, what a life!

LYDIA. Run along—she must have it quickly—

CHERKUN. How is Anna?

LYDIA (*with a shrug*). She's—all right. What else can one say?

CHERKUN. It'll be hard for me—I mean, for her to see me—

LYDIA. What is it you want from her?

CHERKUN. Please do me a favor and tell her—that Nadezhda Polikarpovna has left. I explained to her why I acted as I did and asked her to forgive me. She left—and won't return—

LYDIA. I don't quite understand it.

CHERKUN. She—she woke up the animal in me— Well, I kissed her —I couldn't control myself— There's such power in that woman!

LYDIA (*ironically*). Oh! So it's her fault! You were seduced! Poor man!

CHERKUN (*quietly*). You—you feel disgust for me?

LYDIA (*quietly, but strongly, vengefully*). I do—disgust and—contempt!

CHERKUN. Oh, you mustn't. When you saw me about to fall, why didn't you—

LYDIA. I don't save people from destruction. Those who can't save themselves had better perish! That's what refreshes life—destroys what's superfluous—and only the superfluous!

CHERKUN. I had a feeling—you sought something in me. I admired you very much, and well, I daren't say it now—

LYDIA. No, you daren't say it! I did seek—I thought I might find a man who is stanch and firm, who can be respected—I've been seeking a long time—seeking a man I could bow to—with whom I could walk side by side. Perhaps this is a dream, but I'll go on looking for such a man—

CHERKUN. So that you may bow to him?

LYDIA. And walk by his side. Why, are there no men upon this earth who are heroes—high priests—some to whom life means great creative work? It cannot be!

CHERKUN (*in a choked voice, despairingly*). It's impossible to preserve oneself here. You must understand this—it's impossible. The influence of this life, this filth—

LYDIA (*wrathfully*). Everywhere I meet only wretched and greedy people—everywhere! *A shot is heard outside.*

CHERKUN (*wearily*). Oh, again! What is it now?

ANNA *bursts out of her room, followed by* BOGAYEVSKAYA.

ANNA. Yegor! Where was that? Oh, my God! (*She falls onto the sofa.*)

LYDIA (*going to the door*). I'll have a look.

BOGAYEVSKAYA. And I was thinking of going to bed—

TSYGANOV (*at the hall door*). Don't go out—

CHERKUN. Who was shooting?

TSYGANOV (*pale, his mustache drooping*). She—Nadezhda Polikarpovna—

CHERKUN. At whom?

TSYGANOV (*shuddering*). Herself—right in front of me—and her husband—so calmly, too—so simply—damn it!

BOGAYEVSKAYA (*moving toward the hall*). Isn't she the fool? Who would have thought it?

ANNA (*rushing over to her husband*). Yegor—you're not to blame for it. You're not, Yegor.

CHERKUN. Where's—that Doctor? *Enter* MONAKHOV.

MONAKHOV. No doctor is needed—nothing is needed— You've killed a human being. Why?

ANNA. You didn't do it, Yegor, you didn't—

MONAKHOV (*quietly, with an expression of horror*). What have you done? Tell me, what have you done?

There is no answer. The howling of the wind is heard outside.

CURTAIN

ENEMIES

UNDER the old regime, strikes of workers were forbidden by law, and were suppressed by the authorities whenever they occurred. The method of suppression was that of house-to-house searches to obtain evidence of "subversive ideas," and rounding up of "ringleaders," both operations performed by the police or the *gendarmerie* (the political secret police) and assisted by troops when the situation assumed "an ugly aspect." In "Enemies" the strike situation is complicated by the murder of the director of the factory at an early stage of the conflict. Taking part in a strike and particularly agitating for and organizing a strike was regarded as a political offense which was handled by the gendarmerie and other agencies of the government without recourse to court procedure. Murder cases however were usually tried in court. This is why in the play the preliminary investigation is conducted not only by Captain Boboyedov, of the gendarmerie, but also by Assistant District Attorney Skrobotov.

In the early years of this century in which the action of the play is laid, "socialism" was a forbidden and dangerous word which could only be whispered. It was preached secretly, mainly among students and workers, by various groups which differed among themselves in the formulation of their aims and the methods of achieving them. All socialists supported and often organized strikes, although some were interested in their political effects while others were concerned with the immediate economic benefits for the workers. In the play the actual role played by socialists in provoking the strike seems to be negligible, and among the workers themselves, as in the case of Levshin, ideas have currency which have more in common with the moral concepts of Leo Tolstoy than with the economic concepts of socialism. The attitude toward strikes and socialism among the well-to-do, the bourgeoisie, followed the familiar pattern. It was either violently belligerent, denouncing them as a menace to society and culture, or it was more yielding, ready to make concessions on minor points, for reasons of humanity, but equally uncompromising when it came to defending the employers as a class and denying the right of the workers to demand social and economic equality. Both points of view, the strictly conservative and the liberal, have their spokesmen in the play.

A. B.

ENEMIES

CHARACTERS

Bogdan Denisovich Pologhy, an office clerk
Kon, a former soldier
Agrafena, the housekeeper in the Bardins' home
Yakov Ivanovich Bardin, brother of Zakhar Bardin, age 40
General Pechenegov, uncle of the Bardins
Mikhail Vassilyevich Skrobotov, Zakhar Bardin's partner, age 40
Matvey Nikolayevich Sintsov, an office clerk
Polina Dmitriyevna, wife of Zakhar Bardin, age close to 40
Zakhar Ivanovich Bardin, age 45
Nikolay Vassilyevich Skrobotov, an assistant district attorney, brother of Mikhail Skrobotov
Tatyana, wife of Yakov Bardin, age 28, an actress (stage name Tatyana Lugovaya)
Nadya, Polina's niece, age 18
Cleopatra Petrovna, wife of Mikhail Skrobotov, age 30
Alexey Grekov, a worker
Levshin, an elderly worker
Police Sergeant
Police Inspector
Yagodin, a worker
Pavel Ryabtsov, a worker
Captain Boboyedov
Corporal Kvach
A Lieutenant

ACT I

A garden. Tall old linden trees. Downstage, under the trees, a soldier's white tent. Right, under the trees, a wide bench made of turf, with a table in front. Left, in the shade of the lindens, a long table laid for breakfast with a small samovar boiling on it. Around this table are several wicker chairs.

AGRAFENA *is making coffee.* KON, *smoking a pipe, and* POLOGHY *are standing under a tree.*

POLOGHY (*talking with absurd gesticulations*). Of course, what you say is right—I'm a small man and my life is a trivial one. But I've grown every cucumber with my own hands, and I cannot permit anybody to rip them off without recompense to me.

KON (*gloomily*). Nobody's asking for your permission.

POLOGHY (*pressing his hand to his heart*). But excuse me! If your property is being destroyed, haven't you the right to ask for the protection of the law?

KON. Ask for it. Today it's cucumbers that are ripped off, tomorrow it'll be heads. There's the law for you.

POLOGHY. It's strange and even dangerous, I must say, to hear such opinions. How can you, a soldier, disregard the law?

KON. There is no such thing as the law. There's the command. Left face—forward march! And you march. You're told: Halt! and you halt.

AGRAFENA. You shouldn't smoke your shag here, Kon. Even the leaves on the trees wither from it.

POLOGHY. I could understand it if they did it from hunger. Hunger can explain many acts. It can be said that all vile acts are done to satisfy hunger. When a man wants to eat, then of course—

KON. Angels don't eat. Yet Satan rose against God—

POLOGHY (*joyfully*). It's just that sort of thing that I call mischief-making—

YAKOV BARDIN *comes on. He speaks in a low voice and with an air of listening closely to his own words.* POLOGHY *bows to him.* KON *greets him casually with a military salute.*

YAKOV. Good morning. What is it, Pologhy?

POLOGHY. I want to make a request of Zakhar Ivanovich.

AGRAFENA. He's come to make a complaint. The factory boys stole some of his cucumbers last night.

YAKOV. Oh! My brother should be told of that.

POLOGHY. Very true. That's just why I'm going to him.

KON (*in a querulous tone*). You're not going anywhere—you just stand here and whine.

POLOGHY. I don't think I'm in your way or disturbing you. Of course, I might be, if you were reading a newspaper or doing something—

YAKOV. Kon, come here.

KON (*walking up to* YAKOV). You're a niggard, Pologhy, a pettifogger.

POLOGHY. You have no reason at all to say such things. The tongue is given to human beings for lodging complaints.

AGRAFENA. Do stop it, Pologhy—you talk as if you weren't a human being but a mosquito.

YAKOV (*to* KON). What does he want here? I wish he'd go—

POLOGHY (*to* AGRAFENA). If my words disturb your ears, but don't touch your heart, I'll keep silent. (*He moves off down a path and strolls leisurely back and forth, putting out his hand to feel the trees.*)

YAKOV (*with embarrassment*). Well, Kon, I seem to have—offended somebody again last night?

KON (*smiling*). You did—that you did.

YAKOV (*moving about*). H'm! It's extraordinary. Why do I always say offensive things when I'm drunk?

KON. That happens to people. Sometimes, when he's drunk, a man is better than when he's sober, has more courage in him. He's afraid of nobody, and doesn't go too easy on himself either. We had a sergeant in our company. Sober, he was a lickspittle, a tattler, liked to use his fists. But when he was drunk, he would cry. Boys, says he, I'm a man too—spit in my face, he begs us. And some did spit.

YAKOV. And who did I talk to last night?

KON. The district attorney. You called him a wooden head. Then you told him the director's wife has a lot of lovers.

YAKOV. I see. What business is that of mine?

KON. I don't know. You also—

YAKOV. Fine, Kon, that'll do. Or I may discover that I said something nasty to everybody. Yes, what a misfortune it is—this vodka. (*He walks up to the table, gazes at the bottles, then fills a glass with vodka and sips it.* AGRAFENA, *watching him out of the corner of her eye, sighs.*) You're a bit sorry for me, are you?

AGRAFENA. I am, very much. You act so simple with everybody, as if you weren't a master.

YAKOV. Now Kon doesn't feel sorry for anybody. He only philosophizes. To make a man think, you have to wrong him, isn't that so, Kon? (*In the tent the* GENERAL *is heard shouting:* "Hey, Kon!") You've been taking it on the chin a lot—is that why you're so intelligent?

KON (*walking off*). The moment I lay eyes on the General I turn into a fool. *The* GENERAL *comes out of the tent.*

GENERAL. Kon! Time for my swim!

YAKOV (*sitting down and rocking in a chair*). Is my wife still asleep?

AGRAFENA. No, she's up. She's already been for a swim.

YAKOV. So you're sorry for me?

AGRAFENA. You ought to get yourself treated.

YAKOV. Well, pour me a drop of cognac.

AGRAFENA. Perhaps you shouldn't, Yakov Ivanovich?

YAKOV. Why not? If I don't have one drink, it won't help me any.

With a sigh AGRAFENA *pours* YAKOV *some cognac. Enter* MIKHAIL SKROBOTOV, *with hurried steps. He is excited, fingers his pointed little black beard, and keeps squeezing the hat he carries.*

MIKHAIL. Is Zakhar Ivanovich up? Not yet? Naturally. Give me—have you some cold milk? Thanks. Good morning, Yakov Ivanovich. Have you heard the news? Those scoundrels demand that I fire the foreman Dichkov, no less! They threaten to stop working—the devil take them!

YAKOV. Well, dismiss the foreman.

MIKHAIL. That's simple enough, but that's not the question. The thing that matters is that concessions spoil them. Today they demand dismissal of the foreman, tomorrow I'll have to hang myself to satisfy them.

YAKOV (*softly*). You think they'll want that tomorrow?

MIKHAIL. You think it's funny. You should try to handle these grimy gentlemen—nearly a thousand strong—their heads turned by your brother with his liberal notions and by those idiots who go around passing out illicit handbills. (*Glances at his watch.*) It's almost ten, and they've promised to start their fireworks right after dinner. Yes, Yakov Ivanovich, during my leave of absence your worthy brother has ruined our factory—corrupted the men by his lack of firmness—

Enter, from right, SINTSOV. *He looks about thirty. There is something calm and impressive about his figure and face.*

SINTSOV. Mikhail Vassilyevich! Delegates representing the workers have come to the office. They demand to see the head.

MIKHAIL. Demand? Tell them to go to hell!

POLINA *comes on from left.* I beg your pardon, Polina Dmitriyevna.

POLINA (*amiably*). You're always swearing. What is it this time?

MIKHAIL. It's that proletariat. It demands. Formerly, it begged of me humbly.

POLINA. You certainly can be hard on people.

MIKHAIL (*spreading his arms*). There you are!

SINTSOV. What am I to tell the delegates?

MIKHAIL. Let them wait. You can go.

SINTSOV *goes off unhurriedly.*

POLINA. That clerk has an interesting face. How long has he been with us?

MIKHAIL. About a year, I believe.

POLINA. He gives the impression of being a decent sort. Who is he?

MIKHAIL (*with a shrug*). He gets forty rubles a month. (*Glances at his watch, looks around with a sigh, and notices* POLOGHY.) Are you looking for me?

POLOGHY. I'm waiting to see Zakhar Ivanovich.

MIKHAIL. Why?

POLOGHY. On account of a violation of property rights.

MIKHAIL (*to* POLINA). There—I present to you—another of our new employees—a man with an urge for truck-gardening. He's firmly convinced that everything on this earth has been created for the sole purpose of infringing on his interests. Everything interferes with him —the sun, England, new machines, frogs—

POLOGHY (*smiling*). Frogs, when they croak, permit me to say, interfere with everybody.

MIKHAIL. You'd better go back to the office. You have a strange habit of dropping your work to come and make complaints. I don't like it. You may go.

POLOGHY *bows and walks off.* POLINA, *smiling, watches him through her lorgnette.*

POLINA. You *are* strict. He's funny, though. You know, in Russia people are more diverse than in other countries.

MIKHAIL. Say more perverse—viciously so—and I'll agree with you. I've had people taking orders from me for fifteen years. I know what they are—those kind Russian people so painted up in the priestly literature—

POLINA. Priestly?

MIKHAIL. Of course. All those priests' sons, the Chernishevskys, the Dobrolyubovs, the Zlatovratskys, the Uspenskys— (*Looks at his watch.*) Zakhar Ivanovich is a long time coming out.

POLINA. Do you know what he's doing? He and your brother are finishing last night's chess game.

MIKHAIL. And down there they're planning to quit work after dinner. Believe me, Russia will never make good. That's a fact. It's a land of anarchism. There's an ingrained distaste for work and an utter incapacity for order. Respect for the law is absent.

POLINA. But that's natural. How can you have respect for the law in a country where there is no law? Just between ourselves, hasn't our government— AGRAFENA *goes off.*

MIKHAIL. Well, of course. I make no excuses for anybody—including the government. You take the Anglo-Saxons—

ZAKHAR BARDIN *and* NIKOLAY SKROBOTOV *stroll on.* There's no better material for building a state. The Englishman walks before the law like a trained horse in the circus. He has the sense of legality in his bones, in his muscles— Good morning, Zakhar Ivanovich. Hello, Nikolay. Permit me to inform you of the latest result of your liberal policy toward the workers. They demand the instant

dismissal of Dichkov, failing which they'll stop work after dinner. Yes. What have you to say?

ZAKHAR (*rubbing his brow*). I? H'm! Dichkov, you say? The fellow who uses his fists—and annoys the girls? Why, of course, we must fire Dichkov. That'll be only just and proper.

MIKHAIL (*getting excited*). Come, come, my esteemed partner, let's talk seriously. We're discussing business, not justice. Justice is for Nikolay to look after. And I may say once again—justice as you understand it is ruinous for the business.

ZAKHAR. How so, my friend? You're talking in paradoxes.

POLINA. Discussing business in my presence—first thing in the morning?

MIKHAIL. A thousand apologies. Still I'll continue. I regard this conversation as crucial. Before I went on my leave I held the plant like this—(*shows a closed fist*) and while I was here nobody dared to squeak! All those Sunday entertainments, lectures, and that sort of thing—these, you know, I never regarded as useful with men as they are. The raw Russian brain doesn't flare up with the fire of reason when a spark of knowledge falls upon it—it smoulders and smokes.

NIKOLAY. One must speak calmly.

MIKHAIL (*barely able to control himself*). Thanks for the advice. It's very wise, but of no use to me. Your attitude toward the workers, Zakhar Ivanovich, has, in six months, loosened and shaken up the strong machinery built up by my labors over a period of eight years. I was respected, I was regarded as the master. Now it's clear to everybody that the firm has two masters, one kind, the other evil. The kind master is, of course, you—

ZAKHAR (*embarrassed*). Now, really—you mustn't say that.

POLINA. You speak very strangely, Mikhail Vassilyevich.

MIKHAIL. I have reason for the way I speak. I've been placed in the most stupid position. Last time I told the workers I'd rather close the factory than fire Dichkov. They realized I'd do as I said, and calmed down. Last Friday, Zakhar Ivanovich, you said to a worker, Grekov, that Dichkov was a ruffian and you were going to fire him—

ZAKHAR (*softly*). But, my dear friend, if he punches people in the nose and that sort of thing? You must agree we can't tolerate that. After all, we're Europeans, we're civilized people.

MIKHAIL. Before everything else we're manufacturers. Workers punch one another in the nose every holiday—what business is that of ours? As to the necessity of teaching the workers good manners—that's a question you'll have to settle afterward. Right now a delegation of workers is waiting for you in the office. They will demand that you fire Dichkov. What do you propose to do?

ZAKHAR. But is Dichkov such a valuable man?

NIKOLAY (*dryly*). As I understand it, it's not a question here of a man but of a principle.

MIKHAIL. Precisely. The question is—who are the masters in the factory—we or the workers?

ZAKHAR (*put out*). Yes, I know. But—

MIKHAIL. If we give in to them, there's no telling what they'll demand next. They're an impudent lot. The Sunday schools and the rest have had their effect, and after six months the men look at me like a pack of hungry wolves, and already there are illicit handbills circulating among them. The smell of socialism is unmistakable.

POLINA. Such a godforsaken place and all of a sudden—socialism. It's amusing—

MIKHAIL. You think so? My dear Polina Dmitriyevna, when children are small they're all amusing, but gradually they grow up, and one day we find ourselves face to face with full-blown blackguards.

ZAKHAR. What do you want to do then?

MIKHAIL. Close the factory. Let them starve a little—that'll cool them off.

YAKOV *rises, goes over to the table, downs a drink, and slowly walks off.*

Once the factory is closed, the women will swing into action. They'll cry, and on men intoxicated with dreams women's tears act like smelling salts—they sober them up.

POLINA. You sound awfully cruel.

MIKHAIL. Life demands it.

ZAKHAR. Well, such a measure, you know—is it really necessary?

MIKHAIL. Can you suggest anything else?

ZAKHAR. Suppose I go talk to them, eh?

MIKHAIL. You'll give in to them, of course, and then my position will become impossible. You'll excuse me, but I'm hurt by your hesitation—very deeply. Quite apart from the harm it does.

ZAKHAR (*hurriedly*). But I'm not objecting, my friend. I'm only thinking. You know, I'm more a landowner than an industrialist. All this is new to me—too complicated. One wants to be just. Peasants are easier, more agreeable than workers—I get on with them excellently. There are some very interesting individuals among the workers, but taken in the mass, I agree, they're unruly and dissolute.

MIKHAIL. Especially since you made them all kinds of promises.

ZAKHAR. Well, you see, right after you went away, there sprang up a kind of liveliness—I mean excitement—among them— Perhaps I behaved incautiously—but I had to calm them. There were articles about us in the newspapers—and very sharp ones, you know—

MIKHAIL (*impatiently*). It's seventeen minutes past ten now. The question must be settled. It boils down to this: either I close the factory, or I withdraw from the business. If we close down the factory, we'll suffer no losses—I've already seen to that. The urgent orders are ready for shipment, and our warehouses are pretty well filled too.

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ZAKHAR. Y-yes. The question has to be settled now—I understand. What's your opinion, Nikolay Vassilyevich?

NIKOLAY. I think my brother is right. We have to adhere firmly to definite principles if we want to preserve culture.

ZAKHAR. That is, you also think we should close? Oh, the whole thing is such a nuisance! My dear Mikhail Vassilyevich, don't be annoyed with me—I'll give you my answer in—ten minutes. All right?

MIKHAIL. By all means.

ZAKHAR. Polina, I'll ask you to come with me.

POLINA (*following her husband*). Good Lord! All this is so unpleasant.

ZAKHAR. The peasant has an inborn feeling of respect for the gentlefolk— *The two go off.*

MIKHAIL (*between his teeth*). The jellyfish! He can say that after the peasant riots in the south! The fool!

NIKOLAY. Keep calm, Mikhail. Why lose control of yourself?

MIKHAIL. My nerves are shot, I don't mind saying. I go to the factory and I have to carry this— (*Pulls a revolver out of his pocket.*) I'm hated—thanks to this idiot. But I can't give up the business—you'd be the first to condemn me if I did. All our capital is tied up in it. If I leave, this bald-headed fool will ruin everything.

NIKOLAY (*calmly*). That's bad, if you don't exaggerate.

SINTSOV *appears.*

SINTSOV. The workers are asking you to come and see them.

MIKHAIL. Me? What's up?

SINTSOV. They've heard the rumor that the factory is to be closed after dinner.

MIKHAIL. Now how do you like that! Where did they get it?

NIKOLAY. Probably Yakov Ivanovich told them.

MIKHAIL. Oh, hell! (*Gazes at* SINTSOV *with an irritation which he cannot restrain.*) And why do you, especially, Mr. Sintsov, feel so concerned about it—coming here, inquiring?

SINTSOV. I've been asked by the bookkeeper to come fetch you.

MIKHAIL. Have you? You have the strange habit of looking out from under your eyebrows and twisting your lips in a diabolical smile. What makes you so pleased, if I may ask?

SINTSOV. I think that's my own affair.

MIKHAIL. And I think otherwise. I suggest that you show me more civility in the future. Yes. (SINTSOV *looks intently at him.*) Well? What are you waiting for? *Enter* TATYANA, *left.*

TATYANA. Oh, director— Are you in a hurry? (*Calls to* SINTSOV.) Good morning, Matvey Nikolayevich!

SINTSOV (*amiably*). Good morning. How are you feeling? Tired?

TATYANA. No, I'm not, thank you. Only, my hands are sore from rowing. Going back to your work? I'll walk with you as far as the gate. You know what I want to tell you?

SINTSOV. Of course not.

TATYANA (*walking beside* SINTSOV). In everything you said yesterday there was a lot of intelligence, but even more of—something emotional, deliberately slanted. Some speeches, I feel, are more convincing when they are not colored by emotion— (*Their conversation fades out.*)

MIKHAIL. There's a situation for you, if you please. Your employee, whom you've cut short for impertinence, permits himself, before your very eyes, to be familiar with the wife of your partner's brother. The brother's a drunkard, the wife an actress. What the devil did they come here for? Nobody knows.

NIKOLAY. A strange woman— Good looking, knows how to dress, seductive—and seems to be on the way to having an affair with a pauper. It's bizarre but stupid.

MIKHAIL (*ironically*). There's democracy for you. She, if you please, is the daughter of a village schoolmarm and says she feels drawn to plain people. It must have been the devil prompted me to get mixed up with these landed gentry!

NIKOLAY. Well, you haven't done so badly. You're the head of the business.

MIKHAIL. I will be—but not yet.

NIKOLAY. I think she'd be an easy mark—seems very sensual.

MIKHAIL. Where's that liberal? Has he gone to bed? No, I insist, Russia's not capable of living growth. People have been given all sorts of new ideas, nobody can tell his proper place—they all wander, dream, talk— The government is a bunch of men who've taken leave of their senses—they're vengeful and stupid—understand nothing, are incompetent in everything— *Reënter* TATYANA.

TATYANA. Shouting? Everybody's beginning to shout—I don't know why. *Enter* AGRAFENA.

AGRAFENA. Zakhar Ivanovich asks you to come over, Mikhail Vassilyevich.

MIKHAIL. At last. (*He goes off.*)

TATYANA (*seating herself at the table*). What's he so excited about?

NIKOLAY. I don't think it's anything to interest you.

TATYANA (*calmly*). He reminds me of a policeman I once knew. In our theater in Kostroma we used to have a policeman—a tall fellow, with bulging eyes— He didn't walk, he ran—didn't just smoke, but practically choked on the fumes. One got the impression he wasn't so much just living as jumping and tumbling, trying to reach for something quick. Yet what he was after—he himself didn't know.

NIKOLAY. You think he didn't?

TATYANA. I'm sure of it. When a man has a clear objective, he proceeds toward it calmly. But this one hurried. And it was a peculiar kind of haste—it lashed him on from within—and he ran and ran, getting in everybody's way, including his own. He wasn't avaricious,

greedy. He only wanted avidly to do all he had to do as quick as he could—he wanted to get all his duties out of the way—not overlooking the duty of taking bribes. Nor did he accept bribes—he grabbed them in a hurry, forgetting even to say thank you. One day he got himself run over by some horses and was killed.

NIKOLAY. Are you suggesting that my brother's energy is aimless?

TATYANA. Did I suggest that? I didn't mean it. I just wanted to say that he reminds me of that policeman.

NIKOLAY. That's not very flattering to my brother.

TATYANA. I had no intention of speaking flatteringly of him.

NIKOLAY. You have an original way of being coquettish.

TATYANA. Have I?

NIKOLAY. But not a particularly gay way.

TATYANA (*calmly*). Are there any women who feel gay with you?

NIKOLAY. Well, really! *Enter* POLINA.

POLINA. Today nothing seems to go right in this house. Nobody comes to breakfast, everybody's irritable—as if they didn't have enough sleep. Nadya left with Cleopatra Petrovna early this morning to pick mushrooms in the woods. And I asked her yesterday not to. Oh, God! It's getting so hard to go on living.

TATYANA. You eat too much.

POLINA. Why this tone, Tanya? Your attitude to other people really isn't normal.

TATYANA. Isn't it?

POLINA. It's easy to be calm when you don't have anything and are free. But when you're the source from which a thousand people get their daily bread, it's no joke.

TATYANA. Then drop it, don't feed them, let them live as they please. Give them everything you have—the factory, the land—and stop worrying.

NIKOLAY (*lighting a cigarette*). From what play is that?

POLINA. Why do you talk that way, Tanya? I don't understand you. You ought to see how upset Zakhar is. We've decided to close the factory for a while—until the workers calm down. But you must realize with what a heavy heart one makes such a decision. Hundreds of people will be left without work. And they have children—it's terrible.

TATYANA. Then don't close the factory, if it's so terrible. What's the sense of making things unpleasant for yourself?

POLINA. Oh, Tanya, you irritate me. If we don't close, the workers will go out on strike, and that will be even worse.

TATYANA. How exactly will it be worse?

POLINA. In every way. We can't give in to all their demands, surely. And after all, it's not their own demands—they've simply been taught by socialists, and they just shout what they're told. (*With feeling.*) I don't understand it. Abroad socialism is in its proper place and acts openly. But here in Russia it's being whispered to the workers from

around the corners by people who don't seem to understand that in a monarchist state it's utterly out of place. We need a parliament and not that sort of thing at all. What's your opinion, Nikolay Vassilyevich?

NIKOLAY (*with a curt laugh*). I see it somewhat differently. Socialism is a very dangerous phenomenon. And a country which lacks an independent, or what one might call a racial, philosophy, and where everything is caught on the wing as it comes from outside—such a country is bound to provide suitable soil for socialism. We're a people of extremes—that's our disease.

POLINA. That's very true. We are a people of extremes.

TATYANA. Particularly you and your husband. Or our assistant district attorney for that matter—

POLINA. You don't know it, Tanya, but in our province Zakhar is looked upon as a Red.

TATYANA. I think he turns red only from shame, and not very often at that—

POLINA. Good heavens, Tanya! How can you say that?

TATYANA. Why, is it anything offensive? I didn't know. As I see your life, it strikes me as an amateur performance—the parts are badly cast, there are no players of talent, the acting is terrible—and you can't make out what the script is all about.

NIKOLAY. There's some truth in what you say. And everybody complains—Oh, what a dull play!

TATYANA. Yes, we're spoiling the play. It seems to me, the extras and the stage hands are beginning to realize that. One day they'll drive us off the stage. *The* GENERAL *and* KON *come on.*

NIKOLAY. I say! So that's the way you look at things!

GENERAL (*shouting*). Polina! Some milk for the General—some cold milk. (*To* NIKOLAY.) Ah, here you are—the coffin of laws! My delightful niece, your hand! Kon, answer the question: What's a soldier?

KON (*in a bored tone*). Whatever his superiors want him to be, your Excellency.

GENERAL. Can a soldier turn into a fish?

KON. A soldier must be able to do anything.

TATYANA. Dear Uncle, you entertained us with this scene yesterday. Must we have it every day?

POLINA (*sighing*). Every day after the swim.

GENERAL. Yes, every day. And always different—without fail. This old clown must think up the questions and answers himself.

TATYANA. Do you find it amusing, Kon?

KON. His Excellency does.

TATYANA. And you?

GENERAL. He, too.

KON. I'm rather old for the circus—but you have to bear with it if you want to eat—

GENERAL. You sly rascal! About face—forward march!

TATYANA. Don't you find it boring to make a fool of an old man?

GENERAL. I'm an old man too. And you're pretty boring, yourself. An actress is supposed to make people laugh. And what do you do?

POLINA. You know, Uncle—

GENERAL. I know nothing.

POLINA. We're closing the factory.

GENERAL. Ah! Splendid! It whistles. Early in the morning you're fast asleep—when suddenly—whoo-oo-oo! Close it!

MIKHAIL *comes on quickly.*

MIKHAIL. Nikolay! Come here a minute. Well, the factory's closed. But we have to take measures for any eventuality. Send a telegram to the lieutenant governor—describe the situation briefly and ask for troops. Sign my name.

NIKOLAY. He's a friend of mine, too.

MIKHAIL. I'll go tell these delegates— No, to hell with it! Don't mention the telegram to anybody. I'll announce it myself when necessary. All right?

NIKOLAY. Yes.

MIKHAIL. It's a wonderful feeling, you know, when you get something your own way. I'm older than you in years, my boy, but I'm younger in spirit—don't you think?

NIKOLAY. That's not youthfulness. I think it's just nerves.

MIKHAIL (*with a chuckle*). I'll show you what nerves I have. You'll see. (*Goes off laughing.*)

POLINA. So they've decided, Nikolay Vassilyevich?

NIKOLAY (*going off*). I gather they have.

POLINA. Oh, my God!

GENERAL. What have they decided?

POLINA. To close the factory.

GENERAL. Oh, yes. Kon!

KON. Yes, sir.

GENERAL. Put the fishing tackle in the boat.

KON. It's already there.

GENERAL. I'd rather go fish and save my breath than stay here and be bored to death. (*Laughs.*) That was cleverly put, wasn't it?

NADYA *runs on.*

Ah, little moth! What's happened?

NADYA (*happily*). An adventure! (*She turns around and calls to* CLEOPATRA *and* GREKOV, *who are right behind her.*) Come on, please! Grekov! Don't let him go, Cleopatra Petrovna! You know, Auntie, we were coming out of the woods, when suddenly three drunk workmen popped up—

POLINA. There! Just as I've always told you.

CLEOPATRA. It was perfectly disgusting.

NADYA. Why disgusting? I thought it was funny. Three workmen, Auntie—they smile and say: "Our good dear ladies—"

CLEOPATRA. I'm going to ask my husband to fire them.

GREKOV (*smiling*). On what grounds?

GENERAL (*to* NADYA). Who's this raggle-taggle individual?

NADYA. He saved us, grandpa, don't you see?

GENERAL. I don't see a thing.

CLEOPATRA (*to* NADYA). You're making a mess of your story.

NADYA. I'm not.

POLINA. But I can't make head or tail of it, Nadya.

NADYA. It's because you won't let me tell it to you properly. They come up to us and say, "Ladies, let's you and us sing songs."

POLINA. What insolence!

NADYA. Not at all. "We know," they say, "you have very good voices. Of course, we're a bit drunk, but we're better men when we're drunk"— That's true, Auntie. Drunk they don't look as grim as they always do—

CLEOPATRA. Fortunately for us, this young man—

NADYA. I can tell it better than you. Cleopatra Petrovna began to lay into them—it was quite unnecessary, I assure you. Then one of them, such a tall, thin fellow—

CLEOPATRA (*threateningly*). I know him!

NADYA. He took her by the arm and said in such a sad voice: "You're a beautiful, educated woman, and it's a pleasure to look at you. And you're bawling us out. Have we done anything wrong to you?" He spoke very well, right from the heart. But the other one, he really was bitter. He said to the first: "What's the good of talking to them? Do you think they can understand anything? They're just like wild animals." That's what we are—wild animals—she and me. (*She laughs.*)

TATYANA (*sarcastically*). You seem to be pleased with the title?

POLINA. I told you, Nadya— You run around everywhere—

GREKOV (*to* NADYA). May I go?

NADYA. Oh, no. Please stay. Will you have tea? Or milk? Will you?

The GENERAL *laughs.* CLEOPATRA *shrugs her shoulders.* TATYANA *stares at* GREKOV, *humming to herself.* POLINA, *her head bowed, carefully dries some spoons with a towel.*

GREKOV (*smiling*). No, thank you.

NADYA (*persuasively*). Please, don't be shy. They're all kind people, I assure you.

POLINA (*protestingly*). Oh, Nadya!

NADYA (*to* GREKOV). Don't go. I want to tell the rest of it—

CLEOPATRA (*grumpily*). In short, this young man appeared just in time and persuaded his drunken comrades to leave us alone—and I asked him to see us home. That's all.

NADYA. Oh, my goodness! If it were all the way you tell it—everybody would die of boredom.

GENERAL. How do you like that?

NADYA (*to* GREKOV). Sit down, please. Auntie, do ask him to sit down. Why are you all so sour?

POLINA (*sitting, to* GREKOV). I thank you, young man.

GREKOV. Don't mention it.

POLINA (*more dryly*). It was very kind of you to defend the women.

GREKOV (*calmly*). They needed no defense—nobody was harming them.

NADYA. Oh, Auntie! How can you talk like that?

POLINA. I'll ask you not to teach me—

NADYA. But won't you understand—nobody defended us. He simply said to them: "Leave them alone, boys, you're not being polite." They were awfully glad to see him—they shouted: "Come with us, Grekov, you're a clever fellow!" And he is very clever, Auntie—you must excuse me, Grekov, but it's true!

GREKOV (*smiling*). You're putting me in an awkward position.

NADYA. Not I, Grekov—they're the ones who are doing it.

POLINA. Look Nadya. You know I don't understand such raptures. All this is too funny for words. Let's have no more of it.

NADYA (*excitedly*). Then laugh! Why do you all sit there like owls? Laugh!

CLEOPATRA. Nadya has a knack for turning every trivial incident into a noisy and rapturous story. This is particularly fitting right now, before the eyes of—a stranger who, as you see, is laughing at her.

NADYA (*to* GREKOV). Are you laughing at me? Why?

GREKOV (*simply*). I'm not laughing at you. I'm admiring you.

POLINA (*amazed*). What's that? Uncle—

CLEOPATRA (*snickering*). There you are!

GENERAL. Well, that's enough! One can have too much of a good thing. Here, young man, take this and go.

GREKOV (*turning away*). No, thanks. It's not necessary.

NADYA (*covering her face with her hands*). Oh, why?

GENERAL (*stopping* GREKOV). Wait. This is ten rubles.

GREKOV (*calmly*). What of it? *For a second everybody is silent.*

GENERAL (*embarrassed*). Eh—what are you?

GREKOV. A worker.

GENERAL. A blacksmith?

GREKOV. A mechanic.

GENERAL (*sternly*). It's the same thing. And why don't you take the money?

GREKOV. I don't want it.

GENERAL (*with annoyance*). What kind of comedy is this? What *do* you want?

GREKOV. Nothing.

GENERAL. Perhaps you want to ask for the hand of the young lady? Do you? (*He laughs loudly. The others look embarrassed.*)

NADYA. Oh, what are you doing!

POLINA. Uncle, please—

GREKOV (*to the* GENERAL, *calmly*). How old are you?

GENERAL (*startled*). What did you say?

GREKOV (*in the same tone*). How old are you?

GENERAL (*glancing around*). What's all this? I'm sixty-one. Well?

GREKOV (*walking off*). At that age one ought to be more intelligent.

GENERAL. What? I? More intelligent?

NADYA (*running after* GREKOV). Oh, please—don't be angry. He's an old man. And they're all kind people, really they are.

GENERAL. What the devil!

GREKOV. You don't have to worry. It's all very natural.

NADYA. It's the heat. It's made them ill tempered. And I told the story so badly—

GREKOV (*smiling*). No matter how you might tell it to them, they wouldn't understand—believe me. *The two disappear.*

GENERAL (*enraged*). He dared—to say that—to me?

TATYANA. You made a mistake in thrusting your money—

POLINA. Oh, Nadya, that girl!

CLEOPATRA. My, my! What a proud Spaniard! Well, I'll ask my husband to have him—

GENERAL. A whelp!

POLINA. Nadya is impossible. She's gone with him. How she worries me!

CLEOPATRA. They're getting more and more out of hand every day. These socialists of yours—

POLINA. What makes you think he's a socialist?

CLEOPATRA. I can see through them. All decent workers are socialists.

GENERAL. I'll tell Zakhar—to kick this sniveling youth out of the factory this very day.

TATYANA. The factory is closed down.

GENERAL. Kick him out anyway!

POLINA. Tanya! Go call Nadya—do me a favor. Tell her I'm astounded— TATYANA *goes off.*

GENERAL. The brute! How old are you, eh?

CLEOPARTA. Those drunks were booing us—and you're chummy with them—organize lectures— What good is it?

POLINA. Yes, it's true. Can you imagine? Last Thursday I was driving to the village—suddenly they began booing! Booing even at me —how do you like that! Apart from the rudeness of it, it could have frightened the horses.

CLEOPATRA (*censoriously*). Zakhar Ivanovich is much to blame for

that. He underestimates the distance between himself and these people, as my husband puts it.

POLINA. He's soft-hearted—he wants to be kind to everybody. He's convinced that kind relations with the people are more profitable to both sides. The peasants bear out his view very well. They rent land, pay their dues, and everything goes on excellently. But then—

TATYANA *and* NADYA *return.*

Nadya, my dear, do you understand how unseemly it is—

NADYA (*heatedly*). It's you—it's you who are unseemly! You've gone crazy because of the heat—you're sick and spiteful, and don't understand a thing. And you, grandpa—oh, how stupid you are.

GENERAL (*incensed*). I? Stupid? Another one?

NADYA. Why did you say that—about asking for my hand? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

GENERAL. Ashamed? Well, I never. Thank you. That's enough for today. (*Goes off, shouting.*) Kon! The devil take all your relatives, where have you got stuck with your idiotic feet, donkey, blockhead?!

NADYA. And you, Auntie—you who have lived abroad, who talk about politics. Not to have invited a man to sit down—not to have offered him a cup of tea!

POLINA (*rises and throws down a spoon*). It's intolerable—such talk from you!

NADYA. And you, too, Cleopatra Petrovna—on the way home you were so nice and polite to him—but as soon as you got here—

CLEOPATRA. What am I supposed to do? Kiss him? I'm sorry, he needed a wash. Nor am I prepared to listen to your lectures. You see, Polina Dmitriyevna? Here is democracy for you—or what do you call it—humanism! So far it all falls on my husband's shoulders—but it'll fall on yours too, mark my word!

POLINA. Cleopatra Petrovna, I apologize to you for Nadya.

CLEOPATRA. That's unnecessary. Nor does it matter about Nadya. The trouble is not with her alone. Everybody is to blame. (*She goes off.*)

POLINA. Listen to me, Nadya. When your dying mother asked me to take care of you, to bring you up—

NADYA. Don't mention my mother. You always wrong her.

POLINA (*startled*). Nadya, are you ill? Think what you're saying. I'm her sister. I know more about her than you do.

NADYA (*with tears in her eyes, which she doesn't attempt to check*). You don't know anything. The poor are no relatives to the rich. My mother was poor—and kind. You don't understand poor people. You don't understand even Aunt Tanya.

POLINA. I must ask you to leave me, Nadya. Go, please.

NADYA. I will go. But I'm still right—not you! (*She goes off.*)

POLINA. Ah—my God! A healthy girl, and suddenly such a fit, such hysterics. You'll forgive my saying so, Tanya, but I see your in-

fluence in this—I do. You talk to her about everything as if she were an adult. You take her into the company of employees. Those office clerks—those queer fellows from among the workers—it's absurd! And then—going out boating with those men—

TATYANA. Calm yourself—have something to drink. You must agree you behaved toward that workman—rather unintelligently. Surely, he wouldn't have broken the chair, if you'd asked him to take a seat.

POLINA. No, you're wrong. Nobody can say that I treat the workers badly. But everything must have its limit, my dear.

YAKOV *appears in the rear.*

TATYANA. Another thing—I don't take Nadya anywhere. She goes there herself—and I don't think she should be interfered with in that.

POLINA. She goes herself! As if she understood where she's going.

YAKOV *comes on slowly.*

YAKOV (*sitting down*). Well, there'll be a riot at the factory.

POLINA (*wearily*). Oh, stop it, Yakov Ivanovich.

YAKOV. Yes, there will be—there will be a riot. They'll set fire to the works and roast us all—like pigs.

TATYANA (*with annoyance*). You seem to have been drinking already.

YAKOV. By this time I've always been drinking. I just saw Cleopatra —she's a no-account. Not because she has lots of lovers—but because in her breast, instead of a soul, there sits an old, vicious dog.

POLINA (*rising*). Oh, God! Oh, God! Everything was going so well, and all of a sudden— (*She begins walking in the garden.*)

YAKOV. A small dog, with a mangy coat— Greedy— It sits and bares its teeth— Has satisfied its hunger—eaten everything—but wants something more— Yet it doesn't know what it wants—and is restless—

TATYANA. Keep quiet, Yakov. Your brother is coming.

YAKOV. I don't want my brother. Tanya, I realize it's impossible for you to love me any more. All the same, it hurts me. Yes, it hurts me, but doesn't stop me from loving you.

TATYANA. You ought to cool yourself off. Go take a dip in the river.

ZAKHAR *comes on.*

ZAKHAR (*as he approaches*). Have they announced the closing of the factory?

TATYANA. I don't know.

YAKOV. They haven't announced it, but the workers know it.

ZAKHAR. How do they? Who told them?

YAKOV. I did. I just went there and told them.

POLINA (*coming up*). Why?

YAKOV (*with a shrug*). Because. It's of interest to them. I tell them everything, if they listen to me. They like me, I think. It pleases them

to see the brother of their boss a drunkard. In their eyes that probably makes me a living example of the idea of equality.

ZAKHAR. H'm—you visit the factory pretty frequently, Yakov—of course, I have nothing against that. But Mikhail Vassilyevich says that talking to the workers, you sometimes criticize the order of things in the factory.

YAKOV. He's a liar. I don't understand anything about orders or disorders.

ZAKHAR. He also says that sometimes you bring vodka with you.

YAKOV. He lies again. I don't bring it, but send for it, and not sometimes, but always. You understand yourself that without vodka I'm of no interest to them.

ZAKHAR. But, Yakov, think, you're the owner's brother—

YAKOV. That's not my only defect—

ZAKHAR. (*offended*). Well, I'll say no more. An atmosphere of hostility is being created around me which I can't understand.

POLINA. Yes, that's true. You should have heard what Nadya was saying here. POLOGHY *rushes on.*

POLOGHY. Excuse me! The director—Mikhail Vassilyevich—has just been—killed!

ZAKHAR. What?

POLINA. You don't mean—?

POLOGHY. Yes, killed—fell to the floor—shot down—

ZAKHAR. Who shot him?

POLOGHY. The workers.

POLINA. Have they caught them?

ZAKHAR. Is the doctor there?

POLOGHY. I don't know.

POLINA. Yakov Ivanovich, go right over, please!

YAKOV (*spreading his arms*). Go where?

POLINA. How did it happen?

POLOGHY. Mikhail Vassilyevich got upset—and kicked a worker in the stomach—

YAKOV. They're coming here.

Hubbub. MIKHAIL SKROBOTOV *is led on, supported under the arms by his brother* NIKOLAY *and* LEVSHIN, *a somewhat bald-headed, middle-aged workman. Walking behind them are a few clerks and workers, also a* POLICE SERGEANT.

MIKHAIL (*exhaustedly*). Leave me—lay me down—

NIKOLAY. Did you see who shot you?

MIKHAIL. I'm tired—very tired.

NIKOLAY (*insistently*). Did you notice who fired the shot?

MIKHAIL. It hurts— Some man with red hair— Lay me down— Some man with red hair— MIKHAIL *is placed on the turf seat.*

NIKOLAY (*to the* POLICE SERGEANT). Did you hear? A man with red hair—

POLICE SERGEANT. Yes, sir.

MIKHAIL. Ah, it makes no difference now—

LEVSHIN. Rest, Mikhail Vassilyevich, it's all right. Oh, human affairs—kopeck affairs. We get ruined for a kopeck— It's a mother to us, and it's our death—

NIKOLAY. Sergeant, ask all who aren't needed here to leave.

POLICE SERGEANT (*in a low voice*). On your way, fellows. There's nothing for you here.

ZAKHAR (*quietly*). But where's the doctor?

NIKOLAY. Misha! Misha! (*He bends over his brother. The others follow suit.*) I think—he's dead—he is.

ZAKHAR. It can't be. He's just fainted.

NIKOLAY (*slowly, in a low voice*). Do you understand, Zakhar Ivanovich? He's dead.

ZAKHAR. But—you may be mistaken.

NIKOLAY. No, I'm not. And it's you who placed him in the line of fire.

ZAKHAR (*aghast*). I?

TATYANA. How cruel—and stupid!

NIKOLAY (*moving toward* ZAKHAR *menacingly*). Yes, you.

POLICE INSPECTOR *comes on the run.*

POLICE INSPECTOR. Where's Mr. Skrobotov? Is he seriously wounded?

LEVSHIN. He's dead. He was always hurrying everybody, and now—there he is—

NIKOLAY (*to the* POLICE INSPECTOR). He said before he died he had been shot by a man with red hair—

POLICE INSPECTOR. A man with red hair?

NIKOLAY. Yes. Take the necessary measures immediately.

POLICE INSPECTOR (*to the* POLICE SERGEANT). Round up all the red-headed men at once.

POLICE SERGEANT. Yes, sir.

POLICE INSPECTOR. Every one of them.

The POLICE SERGEANT *leaves.* CLEOPATRA *comes on, running.*

CLEOPATRA. Where is he? Misha! What is it? A faint? Nikolay Vassilyevich, is this a faint? (NIKOLAY *turns his head away.*) Is he dead?

LEVSHIN. He's found his rest. He threatened to use a pistol. And the pistol, you see, turned against him.

NIKOLAY (*bitterly, in a low voice, to* LEVSHIN). You get out of here. (*To the* POLICE INSPECTOR.) Take him away. NADYA *comes on.*

CLEOPATRA. Well, when is the doctor coming?

POLICE INSPECTOR (*to* LEVSHIN, *in a low voice*). Get going.

LEVSHIN (*quietly*). I'm going. Why push?

CLEOPATRA (*in a low voice*). They've killed him?

POLINA (*to* CLEOPATRA). My dear—

CLEOPATRA (*bitterly, in a low voice*). Go away! It's your doing—yours!

ZAKHAR (*looking depressed*). I understand, of course—you're stunned— But why say such things? Why?

POLINA (*with tears in her eyes*). You can't imagine, my dear, how terrible it is!

TATYANA (*to* POLINA). You'd better get out of here—

CLEOPATRA. It's you who killed him with your cursed flabbiness.

NIKOLAY (*dryly*). Calm down, Cleopatra. Zakhar Ivanovich no doubt realizes his guilt before us.

ZAKHAR (*depressed*). My friends—I don't understand. What in the world are you saying? How can you make such accusations?

POLINA. How horrible! My God, and so pitiless!

CLEOPATRA. So they were pitiless? You set the workers against him, you destroyed his influence among them— They had feared him, had trembled before him—and now you have it—they've killed him. You're responsible for that, yes you are! His blood is on your hands!

NIKOLAY. Enough, Cleopatra—don't shout.

CLEOPATRA (*to* POLINA). You're crying? Let his blood run from your eyes!

POLICE SERGEANT (*coming on, to the* INSPECTOR). Sir.

POLICE INSPECTOR. Not so loud.

POLICE SERGEANT. We've got all the redheads.

The GENERAL *comes into the garden, rear. He is pushing* KON *in front of him and laughing boisterously.*

NIKOLAY. Quiet!

CLEOPATRA. What do you say, murderers?

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same setting. It is a moonlit night. Thick, heavy shadows lie on the ground. On the table, scattered in disorder, are numerous cucumbers and eggs, a quantity of bread, several bottles of beer. Shaded candles light the table. AGRAFENA *is washing dishes.* YAGODIN *is seated on a chair, holding a stick in his hand and smoking.* TATYANA, NADYA, *and* LEVSHIN *are standing at left. All talk in subdued voices and seem to be straining to hear something. The general mood is one of anxious waiting.*

LEVSHIN (*to* NADYA). All that's human on this earth is poisoned by copper, dear Miss. That's why your young heart feels bored. All humanity is bound up with the copper kopeck, but you're still free, and so there's no place for you among the humans. On this earth the kopeck jingles to every man: love me as you love yourself. That doesn't concern you. The little bird neither sows, nor reaps.

YAGODIN (*to* AGRAFENA). Levshin has started teaching the masters too. A queer fellow.

AGRAFENA. Well, he speaks the truth. A little truth won't do the masters any harm.

NADYA. Do you have a very hard life, Levshin?

LEVSHIN. Not very. You see, I have no children. My woman—my wife, that is—is with me, but all my children are dead.

NADYA. Aunt Tanya! Why is it, when there's somebody dead in the house, everybody speaks low?

TATYANA. I don't know.

LEVSHIN (*smiling*). It's because, Miss, we're all to blame before the dead, in all sorts of ways.

NADYA. But Levshin, it isn't always that somebody—gets killed, as he was. People talk low however a man dies.

LEVSHIN. We kill everybody, my dear. Some with bullets, some with words, and everybody with our deeds. We drive people into their graves, and neither see it nor feel it. But when we throw a man right into the arms of death, we begin to get some glimmering of our guilt before him. We feel sorry for him, ashamed before him, and are frightened in our hearts. For we too are being driven out of life, we too are being readied for the grave—

NADYA. Y-yes—that's frightening.

LEVSHIN. Don't worry. It's frightening today, but it'll be all gone tomorrow. Again people will be pushing each other around— Somebody who's been pushed too much will fall, and everybody will be quiet for a minute, a bit uncomfortable. But they'll sigh and pretty soon they'll start it all over again—their accustomed way. Poor muddled people! Now you, Miss—you don't feel guilty—dead folks don't bother you, you can talk out loud even when you're near them—

TATYANA. What's to be done to make life different? Do you know?

LEVSHIN (*mysteriously*). We have to destroy the kopeck—bury it. Once it's gone, why quarrel, why squeeze each other?

TATYANA. Is that all?

LEVSHIN. That'll be plenty for a start.

TATYANA. Care for a stroll in the garden, Nadya?

NADYA (*pensively*). All right—

The two withdraw to the rear of the garden. LEVSHIN *moves up to the table. The* GENERAL, KON, *and* POLOGHY *appear near the tent.*

YAGODIN. You don't mind scattering seed even on a stone, Levshin. You're queer.

LEVSHIN. Why?

YAGODIN. You're wasting your time. Do you think they'll understand? The worker's heart will, but it won't suit the master's.

LEVSHIN. She's a nice lass. Grekov was telling me about her.

AGRAFENA. Will you have more tea?

LEVSHIN. That I will.

The three at the table fall silent. The GENERAL'S *rich voice is heard. The white dresses of* NADYA *and* TATYANA *are seen gleaming through the trees.*

GENERAL. Or you can stretch a line across the road—so it can't be seen. A man is walking along and suddenly—plop!

POLOGHY. It's pleasant to see a man fall, Your Excellency.

YAGODIN. Do you hear?

LEVSHIN. I hear—

KON. Nothing of that sort can be done today—there's a dead man in the house. When there's a dead man you can't joke.

GENERAL. I take no lessons from you. When you die I'll dance.

TATYANA *and* NADYA *come down toward the table.*

LEVSHIN. The man's in his second childhood.

AGRAFENA (*walking off to the house*). He's a great one at practical jokes—

TATYANA (*sitting down at the table*). Tell me, Levshin, are you a socialist?

LEVSHIN (*simply*). Me? No. Yagodin and I, we're both weavers.

TATYANA. Do you know any socialists? Have you heard of them?

LEVSHIN. We've heard. Know them—we don't. But we've heard of them, oh, yes!

TATYANA. Do you know Sintsov, the office clerk?

LEVSHIN. We know him. We know everybody in the office.

TATYANA. Have you talked to him?

YAGODIN (*uneasily*). What can we talk about? They're above, we're below. When we come to the office they tell us what the director told them to say—and that's all. There's all our acquaintance.

NADYA. You seem to be afraid of us, Levshin? You don't have to be —we're merely interested—

LEVSHIN. We're not afraid. We've done nothing wrong. They've called us here to watch the place, and we've come. Some men down there got bitter in their hearts and now they're saying: We'll set fire to the factory and everything—there'll be nothing left but embers. But we're against mischief. We mustn't burn anything. Why burn? We built it all ourselves—with our fathers and grandfathers—and all of a sudden we have to burn it! Oh, no!

TATYANA. Perhaps you think we're asking you questions for some evil purpose?

YAGODIN. Why? We want no evil.

LEVSHIN. The way we look at it is like this: what's been made with your hands is sacred. Man's work has to be valued fairly, there's no question about that, but burn it—no! But our folks don't think—they love fire. And they're bitter. The director was very stern with us while he lived—not that I want to speak ill of him. He waved his pistol —threatened—

NADYA. And Uncle? Is he better?

YAGODIN. Who, Zakhar Ivanovich?

NADYA. Yes. Is he kind? Or does he—treat you badly too?

LEVSHIN. We don't say that.

YAGODIN. They're all the same to us—the stern and the kind ones.

LEVSHIN (*amiably*). The stern one is a master, and the kind one is a master. Disease doesn't pick and choose between people.

YAGODIN (*listlessly*). Of course Zakhar Ivanovich is a good-hearted man—

NADYA. Then he's better than Skrobotov?

YAGODIN (*quietly*). Skrobotov is dead.

LEVSHIN. Your uncle, Miss, is a fine man—to look at. Only that doesn't make our lot any easier.

TATYANA (*with irritation*). Come on, Nadya. They don't want to understand us—you can see it.

NADYA (*quietly*). Yes.

The two go off in silence. LEVSHIN *looks after them, then glances at* YAGODIN—*they both smile.*

YAGODIN. By heaven, they do tear at your soul.

LEVSHIN. You see, they're interested to know—

YAGODIN. And maybe they think we'll blab out something—

LEVSHIN. The young miss is a good girl. It's a pity she's rich.

YAGODIN. We must tell Sintsov the madam has been asking questions.

LEVSHIN. We will. And we'll tell Grekov too.

YAGODIN. I wonder what's going on at the factory. They have to give in to our demands.

LEVSHIN. They'll give in. Later they'll take it all back.

YAGODIN. Out of our hides—

LEVSHIN. Naturally.

YAGODIN. Y-yes. Ah, I feel sleepy.

LEVSHIN. Hold on. Here comes the General.

The GENERAL *comes on.* POLOGHY *walks deferentially beside him, with* KON *behind. Suddenly* POLOGHY *grasps the* GENERAL *by the elbow.*

GENERAL. What's that?

POLOGHY. A hole in the ground.

GENERAL. Ah! What's this on the table? Muck, it looks like to me! Were you eating this?

YAGODIN. Yes, sir. Your granddaughter ate with us too.

GENERAL. Well, so you're guarding the house, eh?

YAGODIN. Yes, sir—we're keeping watch.

GENERAL. Good for you! I'll tell the governor about you. How many of you here?

LEVSHIN. Two.

GENERAL. Fool! I can count up to two. How many of you altogether?

YAGODIN. About thirty.

GENERAL. Have you firearms?

LEVSHIN (*to* YAGODIN). Where's your pistol?

YAGODIN. Here it is.

GENERAL. Don't take it by the muzzle—damn fool! Kon, teach these idiots how to handle firearms. (*To* LEVSHIN.) Have you got a revolver?

LEVSHIN. No, I haven't.

GENERAL. Well, will you shoot if the mutineers come?

LEVSHIN. They won't come, Your Excellency. They got worked up, but it's all over now.

GENERAL. What if they do come?

LEVSHIN. They feel sore on account of the closing of the factory. Some of them have children—

GENERAL. Don't give me that stuff! I'm asking—are you going to shoot?

LEVSHIN. Why, Your Excellency, we're ready. If there's any shooting to be done, we'll do it—why not? Only we don't know how to shoot, and we haven't anything to shoot with. If we had rifles—or guns—

GENERAL. Kon, go teach them. Go that way, to the river.

KON (*sullenly*). I beg to inform Your Excellency, it's night now—and there'll be excitement if we start shooting—people will come to see what it's about. However, I'll do whatever you say.

GENERAL. Hold off till tomorrow.

LEVSHIN. And tomorrow it'll be all quiet. The factory will open—

GENERAL. Who'll open it?

LEVSHIN. Zakhar Ivanovich. He's having a talk with the workers right now.

GENERAL. Damn it! I'd close that factory for good—to hell with that early morning whistle!

YAGODIN. A later hour would suit us better too.

GENERAL. And I'd starve all of you to death. A lesson to you—not to mutiny!

LEVSHIN. Why, Your Excellency, we don't mutiny.

GENERAL. Silence! What are you hanging around here for? You must walk along the wall. And if anybody tries to get over—shoot! I'll answer for you.

LEVSHIN. Come on, Yagodin. Don't forget your pistol.

LEVSHIN *and* YAGODIN *go off.*

GENERAL (*after them*). Pistol! Stupid asses! Can't even call the thing by its right name!

POLOGHY. If I may take the liberty, Your Excellency, these people are all coarse and brutal. I'll cite my own case. Having a plot of land, I grow vegetables on it, doing all the work with my own hands—

GENERAL. That's to your credit.

POLOGHY. I work during my free time—

GENERAL. Everybody must work.

TATYANA *and* NADYA *are approaching.*

TATYANA (*from a distance*). Why are you shouting?

GENERAL. They annoy me. (*To* POLOGHY.) Well?

POLOGHY. But almost every night the workers purloin the fruits of my labor—

GENERAL. They steal?

POLOGHY. Exactly. I try to secure the protection of the law, but same is represented here by the Police Inspector, a person indifferent to the sufferings of the population—

TATYANA (*to* POLOGHY). Listen, Mr. Pologhy, why do you speak in such a stupid language?

POLOGHY (*embarrassed*). I? I'm sorry. But I went to a high school for three years and I read the newspaper daily.

TATYANA. Oh, I see—

NADYA. You're very funny, Pologhy.

POLOGHY. If it pleases you, I'm very glad. A man has to be pleasant—

GENERAL. I love fishing. Do you?

POLOGHY. I haven't tried, Your Excellency.

GENERAL (*with a shrug*). A strange answer.

TATYANA. What haven't you tried—to fish or to love?

POLOGHY (*embarrassed*). The first.

TATYANA. And the second?

POLOGHY. I've tried the second.

TATYANA. Are you married?

POLOGHY. I only dream of that. But my salary being only twenty-five rubles a month, I can't nerve myself to it.

NIKOLAY *and* CLEOPATRA *come on in great haste.*

NIKOLAY (*bitterly*). It's something incredible! Utter chaos!

CLEOPATRA. How dare he? How could he?

GENERAL. What's happened?

CLEOPATRA. Your nephew's a jellyfish! He agreed to all the demands of the mutineers, the murderers of my husband.

NADYA (*quietly*). Surely they're not all murderers.

CLEOPATRA. It's an insult to the dead man—and to me. To open the factory before the man who was killed by these scoundrels for closing it has been buried—why, it's an outrage!

NADYA. But Uncle is afraid they'll burn down everything—

CLEOPATRA. You're a child—and ought to keep silent.

NIKOLAY. And the speech that young whippersnapper made! It was an unmistakable preaching of socialism.

CLEOPATRA. A nobody, an office clerk, orders everything about, offers advice—he even had the effrontery to say that the crime was provoked by my husband himself.

NIKOLAY (*jotting something down in his notebook*). This man is a suspicious character—he's too clever for an office clerk.

TATYANA. Are you talking about Sintsov?

NIKOLAY. Precisely.

CLEOPATRA. I feel as if someone had spat in my face.

POLOGHY (*to* NIKOLAY). Permit me to remark: when reading newspapers, Mr. Sintsov always discusses politics and talks most unfavorably of the authorities.

TATYANA (*to* NIKOLAY). Do you find it interesting to listen to this?

NIKOLAY (*challengingly*). I do. You think you can embarrass me?

TATYANA. I think Mr. Pologhy doesn't belong here.

POLOGHY (*embarrassed*). Please forgive me—I'll go! (*He goes off quickly.*)

NADYA. What's going on?

GENERAL. I'm too old for this business. A murder, a mutiny! Zakhar should have foreseen all this when he invited me here—

ZAKHAR *comes on, looking excited but pleased. He notices* NIKOLAY *and stops in embarrassment, adjusting his spectacles.*

Listen, my dear nephew—eh—do you realize what you're doing?

ZAKHAR. Just a moment, Uncle. Nikolay Vassilyevich!

NIKOLAY. Yes.

ZAKHAR. The workers are terribly worked up. Fearing they might wreck the factory—I satisfied their demand that work be resumed—and also about Dichkov. I laid down one condition—that they hand over the criminal, and they've already started a search for him—

NIKOLAY (*dryly*). They don't have to worry about that. We'll find the murderer without their aid.

ZAKHAR. I feel it'd be better if they would do it themselves—yes. We've decided to open tomorrow noon—

NIKOLAY. Who are we?

ZAKHAR. I—

NIKOLAY. I see. Thank you for the information. It seems to me, though, that after my brother's death his rights have passed on to me and his wife, and if I'm not mistaken, you had to consult us, and not make a decision on your own.

ZAKHAR. But I asked you to meet me. Sintsov took my message to you—you refused to come.

NIKOLAY. You must agree it's difficult for me to consider business matters on the day of my brother's death.

ZAKHAR. But you did go to the factory?

NIKOLAY. Yes, I went there—listened to the speeches— What of it?

ZAKHAR. But you must understand—your brother, it turns out, sent a telegram to the city asking for soldiers. The reply has arrived—the soldiers will be here tomorrow before noon—

GENERAL. Ah, soldiers! That's better! You can't fool around with soldiers!

NIKOLAY. That was a wise step—

ZAKHAR. I don't know. The soldiers will come—the excitement among the workers will rise— God knows what might happen if the

factory weren't reopened. I believe I acted wisely. The possibility of a sanguinary conflict has now been removed—

NIKOLAY. I see it differently. You shouldn't have yielded to these—people, if only out of respect for the memory of the murdered man.

ZAKHAR. Oh, my God—but you're ignoring the possibility of a tragedy.

NIKOLAY. I'm not concerned with that.

ZAKHAR. Maybe. But what about me? I shall have to live with the workers. And if their blood is shed— Besides, they could have wrecked the factory!

NIKOLAY. I don't believe it.

GENERAL. Neither do I.

ZAKHAR (*depressed*). So you condemn my action?

NIKOLAY. I certainly do.

ZAKHAR (*with sincere feeling*). Why—why must we be enemies? You know all I want is to avoid what might happen if—I mean, I want no shedding of blood. Is a peaceful, reasonable course of life impossible? You look at me with hatred in your eyes, the workers with suspicion. Yet I want to do good, nothing but good.

NADYA (*with tears in her eyes*). Don't get upset, Uncle. He doesn't understand. Oh, Nikolay Vassilyevich, how can you fail to understand? You're so clever—why don't you believe my uncle?

NIKOLAY. You'll pardon me, Zakhar Ivanovich, I'm going. I can't engage in a business conversation with children participating. (*He goes off.*)

ZAKHAR. You see, Nadya—

NADYA (*taking him by the arm*). Never mind him. You know the main thing is to have the workers satisfied—there are so many of them, and we're only a few.

ZAKHAR. Wait—I have to say something to you. I'm very displeased with you, yes, I am.

GENERAL. So am I.

ZAKHAR. You sympathize with the workers. That's natural at your age, but one mustn't lose his sense of proportion, my dear. Now, this morning you brought that Grekov to the table. I know him, he's a very intelligent fellow—but you shouldn't have made a scene before your aunt because of him.

GENERAL. Give it to her.

NADYA. But you don't know what happened.

ZAKHAR. I know more than you do, believe me. Our masses are crude, uncivilized—give them a finger and they'll grab an arm—

TATYANA. Like a drowning man clutching at a straw.

ZAKHAR. There's a great deal of animal greed in them, my friend, and what they need is not petting but educating. Please, think this over.

GENERAL. Now I'll speak. You treat me outrageously, you impudent

girl. I have to remind you that you'll be my equal some forty years from now. At that time I will, perhaps, allow you to talk to me as an equal. You understand? Kon!

KON (*back among the trees*). Yes, sir.

GENERAL. Where's—what's his name?—that stick-in-the-mud?

KON. Which stick-in-the-mud?

GENERAL. That sticky one. Or is it muggy, cloggy?

KON. You mean Pologhy? I don't know.

GENERAL (*walking toward the tent*). Find him.

ZAKHAR *walks about hunched over, wiping his spectacles.* NADYA, *seated on a chair, is absorbed in her thoughts.* TATYANA *is watching the scene, standing.*

TATYANA. Is it known who killed Skrobotov?

ZAKHAR. They say they don't know but will find him. Of course they know. (*Glancing around and lowering his voice.*) It was a collective decision on their part—a plot! Truth to tell, he harassed them, even bullied them. There was in him that morbid trait—a love of power. And so they—it's simply terrible. They've killed a man, and they look at you with such clear eyes as if they were completely unaware of their crime. They did it with such a terrifying simplicity.

TATYANA. I've heard Skrobotov was going to shoot, but somebody snatched the revolver from him and—

ZAKHAR. That makes no difference. It was they who killed, not he.

NADYA (*to* ZAKHAR). You ought to sit down—

ZAKHAR. Why did he call for soldiers? They learned about it—they know everything—and that hastened his death. I had to open the factory, of course—or I'd have spoiled my relations with them for a long time. And these are the times when one has to treat them with extra consideration and softness—for who knows how it'll all end? In such periods as ours a wise man has to have friends among the masses— (LEVSHIN *is seen walking, rear.*) Who's that coming?

LEVSHIN. It's us—patrolling.

ZAKHAR. Well, what do you say, Levshin? You people killed a man and now you're gentle and meek, eh?

LEVSHIN. We're always meek, Zakhar Ivanovich.

ZAKHAR (*imposingly*). Yes. And kill meekly too? By the way, Levshin, you're preaching something, I hear, some new theory that says we need no money, no employers, and so forth. One can forgive—that is, understand that in Leo Tolstoy— But you'd better stop it, my friend. That kind of talk will do you no good.

TATYANA *and* NADYA *walk off, right, where the voices of* SINTSOV *and* YAKOV *are heard.* YAGODIN *emerges from among the trees.*

LEVSHIN (*calmly*). And what kind of talk is it? I've lived and thought, so I say what I've learned.

ZAKHAR. Employers are not wild beasts—that's what you have to

realize. You know, I'm not a hard man, I'm always ready to help you. I wish well—

LEVSHIN (*with a sigh*). Of course, nobody wishes himself ill.

ZAKHAR. No, you have to understand—I wish you well.

LEVSHIN. We understand.

ZAKHAR (*after a glance at* LEVSHIN). No, you don't. You're strange people. One moment you're like wild animals, another like children.

He goes off. LEVSHIN *looks after him, leaning on his stick.*

YAGODIN (*coming up*). Has he given you another sermon?

LEVSHIN. A Chinaman. A regular Chinaman. What was he saying? The man simply can't understand anything except himself.

YAGODIN. He wishes well, he said.

LEVSHIN. That's it.

YAGODIN. Let's go—here they come.

The two withdraw to the rear. TATYANA, NADYA, YAKOV, SINTSOV *come on, right.*

NADYA. We're walking, spinning around—as if in a dream.

TATYANA. Will you have something to eat, Matvey Nikolayevich?

SINTSOV. Better give me some tea. I've talked so much today I have a sore throat.

NADYA. Aren't you afraid of anything?

SINTSOV (*seating himself at the table*). I? No, not a thing.

NADYA. And I'm frightened. Suddenly everything's got all tangled up, and now I don't understand any more which people are good and which are bad.

SINTSOV (*smiling*). It'll get untangled. Only you mustn't be afraid to think. Think fearlessly, to the end. There's nothing to fear anyway.

TATYANA. Do you think everything has quieted down?

SINTSOV. I do. The workers seldom win their battles, and even small victories give them great satisfaction.

NADYA. Do you like them?

SINTSOV. That's not the word. I've lived with them a long time, I know them, I see their strength, I have faith in their intelligence—

TATYANA. Faith in the future belonging to them, too?

SINTSOV. In that too.

NADYA. The future—that's one thing I just can't visualize.

TATYANA (*with a chuckle*). They're very sly, these proletarians of ours. Nadya and I tried to talk to them—it was a stupid attempt.

NADYA. I even felt hurt. The old man spoke as if we two were some kind of evil characters, something like spies. There's another fellow here, Grekov—he looks upon people differently. But the old man only smiles—and in a peculiar way as though he were sorry for us—as though we were ill.

TATYANA. Don't drink so much, Yakov. It's not pleasant to watch.

YAKOV. What else can I do?

SINTSOV. Is there really nothing?

YAKOV. I have an abhorrence—an unconquerable abhorrence of business activity and business in general. You see, I'm a man of the third group—

SINTSOV. How so?

YAKOV. It's like this. Men can be divided into three groups: some work all their lives, others are able to lay aside money, and still others will neither work for bread alone—since there's no sense to it—nor put away money—since that's a stupid and rather unseemly occupation. Now I'm one of the third group. It includes all the loafers, tramps, monks, beggars, and other hangers-on of this world.

NADYA. You're being dull, Uncle. And you're not that sort of man at all. You're just sweet and kind.

YAKOV. In other words, no good for anything. I realized that when I was still at school. People are divided into the three groups from their teens.

TATYANA. Nadya is right, Yakov—this is all very dull.

YAKOV. I agree. Matvey Nikolayevich, do you think life has a face?

SINTSOV. Possibly.

YAKOV. Well, it has. Its face is always young. Not so very long ago life regarded me with indifference, but now it looks sternly at me and asks: "What sort of man are you? Where is it you're going?" (*He is frightened at something, wants to smile, but his lips tremble, refuse to obey him, and his face is twisted into a sorry grimace.*)

TATYANA. Now drop that, please, Yakov. The district attorney's down there, walking this way. I'd like you not to talk while he's here.

YAKOV. All right.

NADYA (*quietly*). Everybody's expecting something to happen—and they all feel scared. Why do they forbid me to meet the workers? It's stupid. NIKOLAY *walks up.*

NIKOLAY. May I ask for a glass of tea?

TATYANA. Certainly. Here you are.

There is silence for a few seconds. NIKOLAY *stands, stirring his tea.*

NADYA. I would like to know why the workers don't believe my uncle and generally—

NIKOLAY. They believe only those who orate to them on the theme "Proletarians of the world, unite!" They believe that!

NADYA (*with a shrug of her shoulders, quietly*). When I hear these words—this call to all parts of the world—I feel as if we were all outsiders unnecessary on this earth—

NIKOLAY (*with growing agitation*). Of course! Every person of culture must be feeling like that. Soon, I'm sure, another call will ring out over the earth: "Culture-loving people of the world, unite!" It's time we shouted this. The barbarian is coming to trample thousands of years of human effort under foot. He's on the march, driven by greed—

YAKOV. With his soul in his belly, his hungry belly. It's a spectacle to make one thirsty. (*Pours himself some beer.*)

NIKOLAY. The crowd is marching, driven by greed and organized by the unity of its desire—to fill its stomachs!

TATYANA (*reflectively*). The crowd— Everywhere there's a crowd —in the theater—in church—

NIKOLAY. What can these people bring with them? Nothing but destruction. And, mind you, in this country the destruction will be more terrifying than anywhere.

TATYANA. When I hear anybody talk of the workers as forward-looking people, I feel strange—it's so far removed from the way I see them.

NIKOLAY. And you, Mr. Sintsov, you, of course, disagree with us?

SINTSOV (*calmly*). I do.

NADYA. But don't you remember, Aunt Tanya, how the old man spoke of the kopeck? It seems awfully simple.

NIKOLAY. And what are the reasons for your disagreement, Mr. Sintsov?

SINTSOV. I think differently.

NIKOLAY. A perfectly reasonable answer. But, perhaps, you'll acquaint us with your views?

SINTSOV. No, I'm not in the mood.

NIKOLAY. I'm extremely sorry to hear that. I bear up in the hope that when we meet again your mood will have changed. Yakov Ivanovich, if you don't mind, I'll ask you to walk home with me. My nerves are in such a bad state—

YAKOV (*rising with difficulty*). Certainly—certainly. (*The two go off.*)

TATYANA. This district attorney is a most objectionable person. It goes against my grain to have to agree with him.

NADYA (*rising*). Why do you?

SINTSOV (*with a chuckle*). Yes, why do you, Tatyana Pavlovna?

TATYANA. Because I feel as he does.

SINTSOV (*to* TATYANA). You think as he does, but feel differently. You want to understand things, he doesn't bother—he has no need to.

TATYANA. He's probably very cruel. NADYA *goes off.*

SINTSOV. I think so. Up in town he's in charge of prosecution in political cases, and he treats the prisoners abominably.

TATYANA. Incidentally, he was jotting down something about you in his notebook.

SINTSOV (*with a smile*). No doubt. He has talks with Pologhy—and all in all—he's quite industrious. Tatyana Pavlovna, I'd like to ask you to do something for me.

TATYANA. By all means. If I can, I'll be happy to, I assure you.

SINTSOV. Thank you. I suppose the secret police have been called up.

TATYANA. Yes, they have been.

SINTSOV. That means they'll be searching houses. Could you help me to hide certain things?

TATYANA. You think they'll search your home?

SINTSOV. I'm almost sure of it.

TATYANA. And they may arrest you?

SINTSOV. I don't think so. What have I done? Made speeches? But Zakhar Ivanovich knows that in those speeches I appealed to the workers to preserve order—

TATYANA. And your past—is it spotless?

SINTSOV. I have no past. Well, will you help me? I wouldn't trouble you, but I think everybody else who could hide these things will have their homes searched tomorrow. (*Laughs quietly.*)

TATYANA (*with embarrassment*). I'll be frank with you. My position in the house doesn't permit me to regard the room I've been given as my own.

SINTSOV. Then you can't? Oh, well—

TATYANA. Don't be displeased with me.

SINTSOV. Oh, no! Your refusal is understandable—

TATYANA. But wait, I'll talk to Nadya—

She goes off. SINTSOV *drums on the table with his fingers as he looks after her. Cautious steps are heard.*

SINTSOV (*in a low voice*). Who's there? GREKOV *comes on.*

GREKOV. It's me. Are you alone?

SINTSOV. Yes. There are some people walking around over there. What's doing at the factory?

GREKOV (*with a chuckle*). Well, they decided to find the man who fired the shot. Now the authorities are investigating. Some shout, "The socialists killed him." In short, people are trying to save their filthy skins.

SINTSOV. Do you know who did it?

GREKOV. Akimov.

SINTSOV. No, really? I never would have suspected. Such a nice sensible fellow.

GREKOV. He has a hot temper. He wants to give himself up. And he has a wife, a baby—they're expecting another. I just spoke to Levshin. Full of high-flown ideas, that one—says we've got to get some smaller fry to take the blame.

SINTSOV. He's queer. But damn, it's annoying. (*There is a pause.*) Look, Grekov. You'll have to bury everything in the ground. We have no other place to hide it.

GREKOV. I've found a place. The telegrapher has agreed to take everything. You know, Matvey Nikolayevich, you ought to get away from here.

SINTSOV. No, I won't go.

GREKOV. They'll arrest you.

SINTSOV. Maybe. But if I leave, it'll make a bad impression on the workers.

GREKOV. That's true. But I feel sorry for you—

SINTSOV. Nonsense. The man to be sorry for is Akimov.

GREKOV. Yes. And we can't help him either. He wants to confess. You know, it's funny to see you as the head of the patrol guarding the chief's property.

SINTSOV (*smiling*). What can you do? My men seem to be asleep?

GREKOV. No. They're standing in groups, talking, arguing. What a fine night!

SINTSOV. I wouldn't be staying here either, but I'm waiting for somebody. You're going to be arrested too. I'm sure of it.

GREKOV. So am I. Well, I'm off. (*Goes off.*)

SINTSOV. Good-by. TATYANA *comes on.* Don't trouble yourself, Tatyana Pavlovna. Everything has been fixed. Good-by.

TATYANA. I feel very sorry about it, really.

SINTSOV. Good night.

He goes off. TATYANA *walks about slowly, her eyes fixed on the toes of her shoes.* YAKOV *comes on.*

YAKOV. Why don't you go to bed?

TATYANA. I don't want to. I think I'll go away from here.

YAKOV. You do? There's no place *I* can go. I've already gone past all the continents and islands.

TATYANA. It's depressing here. Everything is rocking on its foundations—it makes your head swim. You have to tell lies, and I dislike that.

YAKOV. H'm—you dislike that—to my regret—yes, to my regret—

TATYANA (*speaking to herself*). But a moment ago I lied. Of course Nadya could have agreed to hide those things—only I have no right to push her onto such a path—

YAKOV. Who are you talking about?

TATYANA. I? It's nothing. How strange everything's become. Just a little while ago life was clear, one had definite desires—

YAKOV (*quietly*). Alas, talented drunkards, handsome idlers, and other specialists of gay living no longer arouse interest. So long as we stood outside the tiresome hurly-burly of existence, we were admired. But the hurly-burly is growing more and more dramatic. Somebody is already shouting: "Hey you, comedians and entertainers, get off the stage!" But the stage—that's your province, Tanya.

TATYANA (*with disquiet*). My province? I thought that as an actress I had solid ground under my feet—that I could reach the heights—(*Wearily yet forcefully.*) I feel uncomfortable, awkward in front of people who stare at me and say with cold eyes, "We know all that. It's old and boring." I feel weak, disarmed in front of them—I can't lay hold of them, arouse them. I want to tremble with fear or joy, I want

to speak words charged with fire, passion, wrath—words that are sharp like knives, that burn like torches— I want to toss them lavishly, to strike awe in people! Let the people flare up, shout, rush out. But I can't find such words. Instead I toss them beautiful words, like flowers, words that are full of hope, happiness, love! They all cry—and I with them—we cry such fine tears. They applaud me, smother me with flowers, carry me in their arms. For a moment I reign over the people. In that moment is life—all life packed in one minute! But living words—I can't find.

YAKOV. We all know how to live only in moments—

TATYANA. Everything that's best is always in a single moment. How I long for different, more responsive, people—for a different, less trivial, life, a life in which art would be a necessity to all and at all times. How I long not to feel myself unnecessary, superfluous—

YAKOV *gazes into the darkness, his eyes wide.*

Why do you drink so much? It's killing you. You used to be handsome—

YAKOV. Drop it—

TATYANA. Do you realize how my heart aches?

YAKOV (*with a kind of horror*). No matter how drunk I may be—I understand everything—that's the hell of it! My brain works on and on, always with devilish insistence. And staring at me I keep seeing a broad, dirty face with enormous eyes which ask me, "Well?" You understand, just the one word, "Well?" POLINA *runs on.*

POLINA. Tanya! Please, Tanya, go in there. I beg of you. It's Cleopatra—she's gone mad! She's insulting everybody— Maybe you can calm her down.

TATYANA (*wearily*). Oh, leave me alone with your squabbles! Hurry up and finish each other off, and stop rushing about, stop getting under other people's feet.

POLINA (*frightened*). Tanya! What's happened to you?

TATYANA. What do you want? Tell me.

POLINA. But look at her—here she comes.

ZAKHAR (*off stage*). I'm asking you, keep quiet.

CLEOPATRA (*off*). You're the one who ought to keep quiet in front of me!

POLINA. She'll make a disturbance here—and the workers are right over there—it's terrible! Tanya, please—

ZAKHAR *comes on with* CLEOPATRA *at his heels.*

ZAKHAR. For God's sake—I think I'm going mad.

CLEOPATRA. You won't run away from me—I'll make you listen. You've been playing up to the workers, you want their respect, and you toss them the life of a man like a chunk of meat to vicious dogs. You are humanitarians at other people's expense, at the cost of their blood.

ZAKHAR. What on earth is she talking about?

YAKOV (*to* TATYANA). You'd better go. (*He leaves.*)

POLINA. Madam, we are decent people and cannot permit a woman with a reputation like yours to shout at us.

ZAKHAR (*alarmed*). Keep quiet, Polina—for God's sake!

CLEOPATRA. What makes you think you're decent? Because you prattle about politics? About the sufferings of the people? About progress and humaneness? Is that it?

TATYANA. Cleopatra Petrovna! That's enough!

CLEOPATRA. I'm not talking to you. You're an outsider here, it's none of your business. My husband was an honest—an upright man. He knew the people better than you. He didn't prattle the way you do. And you, with your vile stupidities, betrayed him—killed him!

TATYANA (*to* POLINA *and* ZAKHAR). Will you go, please?

CLEOPATRA. I'll go myself! I hate you—all of you! (*She goes off.*)

ZAKHAR. Has anybody ever seen such a crazy female?

POLINA (*with tears in her eyes*). We must leave everything—we must go away. Such insults—

ZAKHAR. What's got into her? I could understand, if she had been in love with her husband, lived happily with him. But she changes her lovers twice a year—and she shouts!

POLINA. We must sell the factory.

ZAKHAR (*with annoyance*). Leave, sell—that's no answer. We must think it over—and think well. Now I was just talking with Nikolay Vassilyevich—that female broke in and interrupted us—

POLINA. He hates us, this Nikolay Vassilyevich—he's full of venom.

ZAKHAR (*calming down*). He's been too embittered and shaken up by what's happened, but he's a man of intelligence, and there's no reason for him to hate us. Right now, with Mikhail's death, there are very practical interests that bind us together—yes.

POLINA. I distrust him and I'm afraid of him. He'll cheat you.

ZAKHAR. Those are little things, Polina. The man has sound judgment. The fact is I chose a questionable position in my relations with the workers—that much has to be admitted. This evening, when I spoke to them— Oh, how hostile these people are, Polina—

POLINA. I've been telling you that. They're enemies, always.

TATYANA *walks off, laughing quietly.* POLINA *looks at her and continues in a deliberately louder tone.*

Everybody is our enemy. Everybody envies us—and pounces on us because of that.

ZAKHAR (*pacing with quick steps*). Yes, there's some truth in that too, of course. Nikolay Vassilyevich says—it's not a war of classes, but a war of races, a struggle between the high race and the low race. That's obviously crude—far-fetched. But when you begin to think that we, the people of culture, have created the sciences, arts, and so

forth— H'm, equality, physiological equality—that's all very well. But first you have to be human, become civilized—after that we can talk of equality.

POLINA (*intently*). That's a new line of thought for you—

ZAKHAR. It's still too sketchy, not fully thought out. I must get my own ideas straight—that's what I've got to do.

POLINA (*taking him by the arm*). You're too soft-hearted, my friend —that's the cause of your troubles.

ZAKHAR. We know too little and every so often we get a surprise. For example, Sintsov—he surprised me at first, then won my regard with his great simplicity, his extraordinarily clear logic. It turns out he's a socialist—that's where the simplicity and logic come from.

POLINA. Yes, he attracts one's attention—such an unpleasant face. But you ought to get a little rest—come along, dear.

ZAKHAR (*following her*). And that workman, Grekov. He's so terribly cocky. Nikolay Vassilyevich and I were just recalling his speech. He's barely out of his teens, but how he spoke, with what arrogance!

They go off. There are a few moments of quiet. Strains of a choral song can be heard in the distance. YAGODIN, LEVSHIN, *and* RYABTSOV *come on.* RYABTSOV *is a young fellow with a good-natured, round face, and a habit of tossing back his head. The three workmen stop under the trees.*

LEVSHIN (*quietly and mysteriously*). You and I and all of us, Pavel, are comrades in this business.

RYABTSOV. I know—

LEVSHIN. It's a common business, a human business. Today, my boy, every good soul is worth a lot. People are lifting their minds, listening, reading, thinking— Those who are beginning to understand things are worth a great deal.

YAGODIN. That's true, Pavel.

RYABTSOV. I know. I'm ready to go.

LEVSHIN. A man mustn't rush into anything without thinking. You have to understand first. You're young, and this thing means Siberia.

RYABTSOV. It's all right. I'll run away.

YAGODIN. It may not be Siberia. For Siberia you're too tender in years, Pavel.

LEVSHIN. We'll say Siberia. In this business the more frightening it is the better. If a man isn't afraid of Siberia, he's made up his mind once and for all.

RYABTSOV. I've made up my mind.

YAGODIN. Don't be in a hurry. Think it over.

RYABTSOV. What is there to think about? We killed a man, so somebody has to suffer for it.

LEVSHIN. Truly spoken. Somebody has to. And if one doesn't take it on himself, many others will be bothered—some of the better men

among us, men who are more important to our common cause than you are, Pavel.

RYABTSOV. Why, of course, that's just how I feel. I may be young, but I understand we have to hold fast to one another, like a chain.

LEVSHIN (*with a sigh*). That's it.

YAGODIN (*smiling*). Yes, once we join hands, close in, and give a good push, it's all over for the other party.

RYABTSOV. That's right. No need to talk about it. I'm single, so it's up to me to do it. Only it does turn my stomach to think that it has to be done for the blood of—

LEVSHIN. It's for your comrades, not for anybody's blood.

RYABTSOV. I mean he was such a rotten man—so vicious—

LEVSHIN. It's the vicious one that has to be killed. The kind one will die by himself—he's no trouble to others.

RYABTSOV. Well, is this all?

YAGODIN. This is all, Pavel. Tomorrow, then, you'll go and tell them?

RYABTSOV. Why put it off till tomorrow? I said I'm going now.

LEVSHIN. No, you'd better tell them tomorrow. Night is like a mother—it's a kind counselor.

RYABTSOV. That's true enough. All the same, I'm going now.

LEVSHIN. God be with you!

YAGODIN. Go, Pavel. And don't let anything stop you.

RYABTSOV *goes off unhurriedly.* YAGODIN *turns his stick over, looking at it intently.* LEVSHIN *gazes into the sky.*

LEVSHIN (*quietly*). Fine people are growing up today.

YAGODIN. Good weather, good crop.

LEVSHIN. If it goes on this way, we'll get our lives straightened out yet.

YAGODIN (*sadly*). I feel sorry for the boy.

LEVSHIN (*quietly*). Don't you think I am? A fine prospect, having to go to jail, and for something not so very good at that. He has one consolation, though—he's ruining his life for his comrades.

YAGODIN. Yes—

LEVSHIN. We'd better not talk about that. Ah, I wish Andrey hadn't pressed that trigger. What can you do by killing? Nothing. You kill one dog, the master buys another—that's all there is to it.

YAGODIN (*sadly*). What a lot of our kind get ruined—

LEVSHIN. Come on, watchman. We've got to guard the master's chattels. (*They start off.*) Oh, Lord!

YAGODIN. What's the matter?

LEVSHIN. I'm feeling low. If we could only hurry up and get life straightened out.

CURTAIN

ACT III

A large room in the BARDINS' *house. The rear wall has four windows and a door leading to the veranda. Through the windows can be seen soldiers, gendarmes (members of the secret police), and a group of workers including* LEVSHIN *and* GREKOV. *The room has an uninhabited look: the furniture is sparse and old and consists of odd pieces; the wallpaper hangs loose here and there. A big table stands along the right wall. There is a double door in this wall, and another in the left wall.*

KON *is moving chairs, angrily setting them around the table.* AGRAFENA *is sweeping the floor.*

AGRAFENA. You have no business being angry with me—

KON. I'm not angry. I don't give a damn for anybody— I'll be dead soon, thank God. My heart often misses a beat.

AGRAFENA. We'll all be dead—that's nothing to brag about.

KON. Well, I've had enough of this—I'm sick of it. At sixty-five nothing but dirty tricks, like nuts to crack—I've no teeth for them. They've rounded up a crowd of people—keep them soaking in the rain— *Enter, left,* CAPTAIN BOBOYEDOV *and* NIKOLAY.

BOBOYEDOV (*cheerfully*). Ah, here's the conference room—excellent! So you're to participate in your official capacity?

NIKOLAY. That's right. Call the Corporal, Kon.

BOBOYEDOV. And this is how we're to serve up this dish? In the center that—what's his name?

NIKOLAY. Sintsov.

BOBOYEDOV. Sintsov—a touching sight. And around him workers of the world? Fine. It warms the cockles of your heart. Our host, incidentally, is a charming man—very charming. We thought differently of him in our department. I know his sister-in-law—she played at Voronezh—an excellent actress, I must say.

KVACH *enters from veranda.*

Well, how is it, Kvach?

KVACH. We've searched everybody, sir.

BOBOYEDOV. Yes. And what?

KVACH. We've found nothing—they must have hidden it. I wish to report, sir—the Police Inspector is in a hurry and is doing his job carelessly.

BOBOYEDOV. Well, of course. The police are always like that. Has anything been found in the houses of the arrested men?

KVACH. Yes, at Levshin's, behind the icons.

BOBOYEDOV. Take everything to my room.

KVACH. Yes, sir. The young gendarme, sir, who's joined recently—the one from the dragoons—

BOBOYEDOV. What about him?

KVACH. He too is careless in his duties.

BOBOYEDOV. Well, you'd better handle him yourself. You can go.

KVACH *leaves.*

This Kvach is a character, you know. Nothing much to look at and even a bit stupid, you'd think. But he can smell things out like a dog.

NIKOLAY. You ought to take notice of that office clerk, Bogdan Denisovich.

BOBOYEDOV. Oh, certainly, certainly. We'll put the screws on him.

NIKOLAY. I'm talking about Pologhy, not Sintsov. I think he can be useful in the future.

BOBOYEDOV. You mean the man we had a talk with? Of course, we'll take care of him.

NIKOLAY *walks to the table and carefully lays out papers on it. Enter* CLEOPATRA, *right.*

CLEOPATRA (*at the threshold*). Will you have more tea, Captain?

BOBOYEDOV. Thank you. I shall be glad to. It's beautiful here. A delightful spot. By the way, I know Madame Lugovaya. She played at Voronezh, didn't she?

CLEOPATRA. I believe she did. And how are you making out with your house-to-house search? Have you found anything?

BOBOYEDOV (*gallantly*). Everything, everything. You don't have to worry. Even when there's nothing in the place something is always—found.

CLEOPATRA. My late husband thought very little of all these secret handbills. He used to say, paper doesn't make a revolution—

BOBOYEDOV. H'm—that's not altogether true.

CLEOPATRA. He called the handbills instructions to fools from the secret office of plain idiots.

BOBOYEDOV. That's neat, though also wrong.

CLEOPATRA. And now from papers they've passed to deeds.

BOBOYEDOV. Rest assured they'll be severely punished—most severely.

CLEOPATRA. That gives me great comfort. Your presence here has instantly made me feel relieved—more free.

BOBOYEDOV. It's our duty to bring cheer to society.

CLEOPATRA. And it's such a pleasure to see a contented, healthy man—it's such a rare sight.

BOBOYEDOV. Oh, in our force we have only picked men.

CLEOPATRA. Let's go into the dining room.

BOBOYEDOV (*following her*). Delighted. Tell me, where's Madame Lugovaya playing this season?

CLEOPATRA. I don't know.

They go off. TATYANA *and* NADYA *enter from the veranda.*

NADYA (*excitedly*). Did you notice the look the old man—Levshin—gave us?

TATYANA. I did.

NADYA. Oh, it's all so bad, so shameful! Nikolay Vassilyevich, what's the reason for all this? Why have they been arrested?

NIKOLAY (*dryly*). There are more than enough reasons for their arrests. And I'll also ask you not to walk across the veranda while those men are there.

NADYA. We won't.

TATYANA (*staring at* NIKOLAY). Is Sintsov under arrest too?

NIKOLAY. Mr. Sintsov is under arrest too.

NADYA (*pacing the room*). Seventeen men. Out there, outside the gate, their wives are crying—and the soldiers shove them around, laugh at them. Tell the soldiers to behave decently.

NIKOLAY. I have nothing to do with that. The soldiers are under the command of Lieutenant Strepetov.

NADYA. I'll go ask him—

She goes out through the door, right. TATYANA *walks up to the table, smiling.*

TATYANA. Now then, you cemetery of laws, as the General calls you—

NIKOLAY. The General doesn't strike me as a man of wit. I wouldn't repeat his smart sayings.

TATYANA. I made a mistake—he calls you the coffin of laws. Does it annoy you?

NIKOLAY. I'm just not in the mood for joking.

TATYANA. You're not as serious as all that?

NIKOLAY. May I remind you—my brother was killed yesterday.

TATYANA. How does that affect *you?*

NIKOLAY. What do you mean?

TATYANA (*with a little laugh*). Let's not put on an act. You're not sorry for your brother. You're not sorry for anybody—just as I'm not. Death, or rather the suddenness of death, upsets everybody. But I assure you, never for a single instant were you sorry for your brother with true human compassion—you don't have it in you.

NIKOLAY (*with an effort*). That's very interesting. But what do you want of me?

TATYANA. Have you noticed that you and I are kindred spirits? No? That's a pity. I'm an actress, a cold creature anxious only for one thing —to play a good part. You too want to play a good part and you too are without a soul. Tell me, you want to be a full-fledged district attorney, don't you?

NIKOLAY (*in a low voice*). I want you to end this conversation—

TATYANA (*pauses, then laughs*). No, I've no gift for diplomacy. I had a definite object in mind when I set out to talk to you—I wanted to be extra nice to you—fascinating. But as soon as I saw you I began to make impertinent remarks. You always stir up a desire in me to heap words on you that hurt—whether you be walking or sitting, talk-

ing or denouncing people in silence. Oh, yes, I wanted to ask you for something—

NIKOLAY (*with a curt laugh*). I can guess what it is.

TATYANA. Probably. But it's useless to ask for it now, I suppose?

NIKOLAY. Now or earlier—it doesn't make any difference. Mr. Sintsov is compromised too much.

TATYANA. It gives you a certain pleasure to tell me this, doesn't it?

NIKOLAY. I won't deny it—it does.

TATYANA (*with a sigh*). You see how alike we are! I too am very petty and spiteful. Tell me, is Sintsov entirely in your hands—in nobody else's but yours?

NIKOLAY. Of course.

TATYANA. What if I ask you to release him?

NIKOLAY. It'll be futile.

TATYANA. Even if I make a very special appeal?

NIKOLAY. Even so. You surprise me, really.

TATYANA. Do I? Why?

NIKOLAY. You're beautiful—you're unquestionably a woman of an original turn of mind—one senses character in you. You have innumerable opportunities to make a luxurious, beautiful life for yourself—and you occupy yourself with a nonentity. Eccentricity is a disease. Every intelligent man must regard you with indignation. Anyone who prizes womanhood, who loves beauty, will never forgive you such eccentric conduct!

TATYANA. So I'm condemned—alas! And Sintsov, too?

NIKOLAY. The gentleman will go to jail tonight.

TATYANA. Is that settled?

NIKOLAY. Yes.

TATYANA. And no concessions to please a lady? I don't believe it. If I wanted it very much, you would let Sintsov go.

NIKOLAY (*in a tight voice*). Try it—just try.

TATYANA. I can't—bring myself to it. Still, tell me the truth—it's not difficult to tell the truth once—would you have released him?

NIKOLAY (*after a pause*). I don't know.

TATYANA. I do. (*After a pause, with a sigh.*) What rotters both of us are!

NIKOLAY. There are things, you know, which even a woman can't be forgiven.

TATYANA (*casually*). Oh, fiddlesticks! We're alone—nobody can hear us. After all, I have the right to tell you and myself that we're both—

NIKOLAY. Please—I don't want to listen to you.

TATYANA (*insistently and calmly*). All the same, you set the value of your principles below that of a woman's kiss.

NIKOLAY. I've told you I don't want to listen to you.

TATYANA (*calmly*). Then go. I'm not holding you, am I?

NIKOLAY *hurries off.* TATYANA *wraps herself in her shawl and, standing in the middle of the room, gazes out at the veranda. Enter, left,* NADYA *and the* LIEUTENANT.

LIEUTENANT. The soldier never hurts a woman, I give you my word of honor. To him a woman is something sacred.

NADYA. You'll see for yourself.

LIEUTENANT. It's impossible. The army is the only place where a woman is still treated with chivalry.

They walk across and out the door, left. Enter POLINA, ZAKHAR, *and* YAKOV.

ZAKHAR. You see, Yakov—

POLINA. But think, what else could be done?

ZAKHAR. We have to face the facts, the necessities of the situation—

TATYANA. What's this?

YAKOV. He's raking me over the coals—

POLINA. Such extraordinary cruelty! Everybody's pouncing on us. Even Yakov Ivanovich, who's always so gentle. But was it we who called the soldiers? Nor did anybody invite the gendarmes. They always come by themselves.

ZAKHAR. To accuse us of these arrests—

YAKOV. I'm not accusing you—

ZAKHAR. You don't say it in so many words, but I feel it—

YAKOV (*to* TATYANA). I was sitting. Zakhar walked up to me and said, "How are you feeling, old man?" And I said, "I'm disgusted, old man." That was all.

ZAKHAR. But you have to understand that socialistic propaganda, the way it's carried on in Russia, is impossible, is intolerable anywhere—

POLINA. Take part in politics—yes, we all should—but what's that got to do with socialism? That's what Zakhar says. And he's right.

YAKOV (*dejectedly*). Now what sort of a socialist is old Levshin? He's simply overworked and talks deliriously—from fatigue.

ZAKHAR. They're all delirious.

POLINA. One must show some consideration for other people's feelings. It's been such torture for us.

ZAKHAR. You think it doesn't upset me to see a tribunal being set up in my house? But all this is Nikolay Vassilyevich's idea, and it would have been impossible to argue with him after such a tragedy.

CLEOPATRA *enters hurriedly.*

CLEOPATRA. Have you heard? The murderer has been found. They'll be bringing him in here pretty soon.

YAKOV (*muttering to himself*). There it is—

TATYANA. Who is he?

CLEOPATRA. Some youngster. I'm glad. Probably, it's wrong from the humanitarian point of view, but I'm glad all the same. And see-

ing that he's a youngster, I'd have him flogged every day until the trial. Where's Nikolay Vassilyevich? Have you seen him?

She walks toward the door, left, as the GENERAL *enters by the same door.*

GENERAL (*sullenly*). Well, well—all standing around like wet hens.

ZAKHAR. It's an unpleasant situation, Uncle.

GENERAL. What? The gendarmes? Yes, this Captain is a regular bounder. I'd like to play a trick on him. Are they staying here for the night?

POLINA. I don't think so. What for?

GENERAL. That's a pity. It would be a good idea to dump a bucket of cold water on him when he goes to sleep. They used to do that to lily-livered cadets in my school days. It's terribly funny when a naked man dripping with water starts jumping and yelling.

CLEOPATRA (*standing at the door*). God knows what you're saying, General. And what reasons have you? The Captain is a very decent man and wonderfully active. He came here and rounded up everybody. We have to appreciate that. (*She goes off.*)

GENERAL. H'm—in her eyes all men with long mustaches are decent. What I say is everybody must know his place. Decency is precisely that. (*Walks to the door, left.*) Hey, Kon! (*Exits.*)

POLINA (*in a low voice*). She positively feels herself mistress here. Look how she behaves—so ill mannered—so rude!

ZAKHAR. I wish it would be all over soon. I want peace, rest, a normal life. NADYA *rushes on.*

NADYA. Aunt Tanya, he's a fool, that Lieutenant. And he probably beats the soldiers. He shouts, makes terrifying faces— Uncle, something must be done to let the women see and talk to their arrested husbands—five of them have wives. You go tell the Captain—he's in charge here.

ZAKHAR. You see, Nadya—

NADYA. I see that you're not going. Go, please, tell him. They're crying out there. Oh, do go.

ZAKHAR. I'm afraid it's useless. (*He goes off.*)

POLINA. You, Nadya, are always disturbing everybody.

NADYA. It's you who are disturbing everybody.

POLINA. We? Are you in your senses?

NADYA (*excitedly*). All of us—I, and you, and Uncle—it's we who disturb everybody. We do nothing, and are responsible for all that—the soldiers, the gendarmes, and everything. These arrests too—and the women crying—it's all because of us!

TATYANA. Come here, Nadya.

NADYA (*walking over to her*). Here I am. Well?

TATYANA. Sit down and calm yourself. You don't understand anything, nor can you do anything.

NADYA. And you can't even say anything. No, I don't want to calm myself—I don't want to.

POLINA. Your dead mother was right about you—you're an impossible character.

NADYA. Yes, she was right. She worked and earned her bread. And you—what work do you do? Whose bread do you eat?

POLINA. There it goes! I must ask you to stop talking in this tone, Nadya. What is all this shouting at your elders?

NADYA. You're no elders. Now, really, what sort of elders are you? You're just old, that's all.

POLINA. It's really your ideas, Tanya. And you must tell her she's a stupid girl.

TATYANA. Did you hear? You're a stupid girl. (*She strokes* NADYA'S *shoulder.*)

NADYA. There you are. That's all you can say. That's all. You can't even defend yourself— Extraordinary people! Really, you're all unnecessary—unnecessary even here, in your own house.

POLINA (*sharply*). Do you realize what you're saying?

NADYA. Your house has been invaded by gendarmes, soldiers, fools with mustaches, who give orders, drink tea, rattle their sabers, clank their spurs, laugh—and seize people, shout at them, threaten them, make women cry— And you? What say have you got in all this? You've been simply pushed aside into the corners—

POLINA. You're talking sheer nonsense. These people have come to defend us.

NADYA (*sadly*). Oh, Auntie! The soldiers can't defend anybody from stupidity—they just can't.

POLINA (*indignantly*). What's that?

NADYA (*stretching out her hands to* POLINA). Don't be angry with me! I said that meaning everybody. (POLINA *hurries out of the room.*) There—she's run away. She'll complain to Uncle that I'm rude, unmanageable— Uncle will make a long speech—and all the flies will die of boredom.

TATYANA (*reflectively*). How are you going to live? I can't see it.

NADYA (*drawing a circle around herself with her hands*). Not like this. Never. I don't know what I'll do, but I'll never do things the way you do. I was just crossing the veranda with that officer—and Grekov is standing there smoking, and he gives me a look—and his eyes are laughing. Yet he knows he's going to be sent to jail, doesn't he? You see? The ones who live as they please aren't afraid of anything. They're jolly. I'm ashamed to look at Levshin and Grekov— I don't know the others, but these two—these I'll never forget. Here comes the fool with a mustache—ooh! *Enter* BOBOYEDOV.

BOBOYEDOV. How frightening! Who is it you're trying to scare?

NADYA. I'm afraid of you. You will let the women see their husbands, won't you?

BOBOYEDOV. No, I won't. I'm spiteful.

NADYA. Of course, seeing you're a gendarme. Why don't you want to let the women in?

BOBOYEDOV (*gallantly*). Right now it's impossible. But later, before the men are taken away, I'll permit them to say good-by.

NADYA. Why is it impossible? It rests with you, doesn't it?

BOBOYEDOV. Yes, with me, or rather with the law.

NADYA. Oh, bother the law! Let them in, I beg of you.

BOBOYEDOV. The law is a bother, is it? So you too do not recognize laws? Dear me!

NADYA. Don't talk to me like that. I'm not a child.

BOBOYEDOV. I don't believe it. Only children and revolutionists don't recognize laws.

NADYA. Then I'm a revolutionist.

BOBOYEDOV (*laughing*). Oh, in that case I'll have to arrest you and send you to jail.

NADYA (*wearily*). Oh, please stop joking. Do let them in.

BOBOYEDOV. I can't. The law!

NADYA. An idiotic law!

BOBOYEDOV (*seriously*). H'm—you mustn't say that. If you're not a child, as you claim, you must know that laws are laid down by the supreme authorities, and that no state can exist without them.

NADYA (*with feeling*). Laws, authorities, state— Great heavens! But aren't they all for the people?

BOBOYEDOV. H'm—I guess so. But first of all for maintaining order.

NADYA. But it's all worthless, if people are made to cry. Your authorities and your state—they are all unnecessary, if people cry. The state—what a stupid thing! What do I need it for? (*Walks toward the door.*) The state! You don't understand a thing, and still you talk. (*Goes off.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*somewhat nonplussed, to* TATYANA). An original young lady. But a dangerous trend of mind. Her uncle, I believe, is a man of liberal views, isn't he?

TATYANA. You ought to know that better than I. I don't know what a man of liberal views means.

BOBOYEDOV. Why, everybody knows that. A lack of respect for the authorities—and you have liberalism. You know, Madame Lugovaya, I saw you at Voronezh—yes. I greatly enjoyed your acting—it was so subtle, so extraordinarily subtle. You may have noticed, I always had a seat next to the lieutenant governor's. I was an adjutant at our local headquarters then.

TATYANA. I don't remember. It's possible. There are gendarmes in every town, aren't there?

BOBOYEDOV. I should say there are. In every town, absolutely. And I must tell you that we, the administration, more than anybody else, are the true connoisseurs of art. Perhaps, the merchant class too. For

example, take the subscriptions for a gift to a favorite actor on his benefit night—on the subscription list you'll always find names of the officers of the gendarmerie. That's a tradition with us, so to speak. Where will you be playing this coming season?

TATYANA. I haven't decided yet. But, of course, it'll have to be in a town which has true connoisseurs of art. That can't be avoided, can it?

BOBOYEDOV (*missing the point*). Oh, of course. They exist in every town, absolutely. After all, people are getting more cultured—

KVACH (*speaking from the veranda*). Sir, the man who fired the shot is being brought here. What are your orders?

BOBOYEDOV. Bring him in—and all the rest of them, too. Call the assistant district attorney. (*To* TATYANA.) Pardon me. I have to attend to my business for a little while.

TATYANA. Are you going to question them?

BOBOYEDOV (*gallantly*). Just scratch the surface, by way of making their acquaintance. A little roll call, so to speak.

TATYANA. May I hear it?

BOBOYEDOV. H'm—as a rule we don't allow it—in political cases. But this is a criminal case, we're not in our office, and I'm anxious to do something that will give you pleasure.

TATYANA. I'll keep out of sight. I'll watch from over there.

BOBOYEDOV. Excellent. I'm very happy to be able to repay you in some little way for all the pleasure I had in watching you on the stage. I only have to get some papers.

He goes off. Two middle-aged workers bring RYABTSOV *in. Walking alongside them and casting glances at* RYABTSOV *is* KON. *Following them are* LEVSHIN, YAGODIN, GREKOV, *and several other workers. A few gendarmes bring up the procession.*

RYABTSOV (*angrily*). Why did you tie my hands? Untie them, will you?

LEVSHIN. Untie his hands, fellows. Why hurt the man's feelings?

YAGODIN. He won't run away.

FIRST WORKER. That's the rule. The law says to tie them up.

RYABTSOV. I don't like it. Take it off.

SECOND WORKER (*to* KVACH). Officer, do you mind? He's a quiet fellow. We can't understand ourselves how he did it.

KVACH. You may untie him. It's all right.

KON (*suddenly*). You've made a mistake seizing him. At the time of the shooting down there he was on the river—I saw him, and so did the General. (*To* RYABTSOV.) Why do you keep mum, you fool? Tell them it wasn't you who fired. Why don't you speak up?

RYABTSOV (*firmly*). No, it was me.

LEVSHIN. He ought to know, officer.

RYABTSOV. I did it.

KON (*shouting*). You lie, you dirty troublemaker—

Enter BOBOYEDOV *and* NIKOLAY SKROBOTOV.

Why, that very hour you were boating on the river and singing songs.

RYABTSOV (*calmly*). I did that—afterward.

BOBOYEDOV. This one?

KVACH. Yes, sir.

KON. No, he didn't.

BOBOYEDOV. What's that? Take the old man away, Kvach. Who's he?

KVACH. He's with the General, sir.

NIKOLAY (*regarding* RYABTSOV *closely*). Just a moment, Bogdan Denisovich. Leave him alone, Kvach.

KON. Keep your hands off! I'm a soldier myself.

BOBOYEDOV. Stop it, Kvach.

NIKOLAY (*to* RYABTSOV). Did *you* kill the director?

RYABTSOV. I did.

NIKOLAY. Why?

RYABTSOV. He bullied us.

NIKOLAY. What's your name?

RYABTSOV. Pavel Ryabtsov.

NIKOLAY. All right. Kon, what were you saying?

KON (*excited*). He's not the killer. He was out boating on the river at the time. I'll take an oath on it. The General and I saw him. The General even said: It would be a fine thing, he said, if we could upset the boat and make him take a dip—yes. You damn puppy! What are you up to?

NIKOLAY. What makes you so certain, Kon, that he was on the river at the moment the murder was committed?

KON. You couldn't get from the factory to the spot he was in even in an hour.

RYABTSOV. I ran.

KON. He was rowing and singing songs. After you've killed a man, you don't sing.

NIKOLAY (*to* RYABTSOV). You know that the law punishes severely anyone who commits perjury and attempts to screen a criminal—you know that, don't you?

RYABTSOV. It's all the same to me.

NIKOLAY. All right. So it was you who killed the director?

RYABTSOV. Yes, it was me.

BOBOYEDOV. What a wild cub!

KON. Liar.

LEVSHIN. You keep out of this, my friend. You're an outsider here.

NIKOLAY. What's that?

LEVSHIN. I say he's an outsider here but keeps butting in.

NIKOLAY. And you are not an outsider? Are you connected with this murder?

LEVSHIN (*laughing*). Me? Why, sir, I once killed a hare with a stick, and I was miserable afterward.

NIKOLAY. Then hold your tongue! (*To* RYABTSOV.) Where's the revolver with which you fired the shot?

RYABTSOV. I don't know.

NIKOLAY. What was it like? Describe it.

RYABTSOV (*baffled*). What was it like? The kind they usually are—an ordinary one.

KON (*jubilantly*). Oh, the son of a bitch! He didn't even see the revolver.

NIKOLAY. How big was it? (*Holds his hands to show the length of a foot.*) So big? Yes?

RYABTSOV. Yes—a little smaller.

NIKOLAY (*to* BOBOYEDOV). Bogdan Denisovich, come here please. (*Lowering his voice.*) There's some dirty work here. The boy requires sterner treatment. Let's leave him until the court investigator comes over.

BOBOYEDOV. But he's confessing his crime—what more do you want?

NIKOLAY (*impressively*). You and I have a suspicion that this boy is not the actual murderer, but a dummy, you follow me?

YAKOV, *drunk, enters cautiously by the door near* TATYANA *and looks on in silence. Now and then his head drops helplessly as if he were dozing off. Tossing his head back, he gazes about with frightened eyes.*

BOBOYEDOV (*not getting the point*). Oh, I see—yes, yes. Imagine that.

NIKOLAY. It's a plot—a joint crime.

BOBOYEDOV. What a blackguard, eh?

NIKOLAY. Let the Corporal take him away for the present—and keep him completely isolated. I'm going to leave you for a minute. Kon, I want you to come with me. Where's the General?

KON. He's digging worms. NIKOLAY *and* KON *go off.*

BOBOYEDOV. Take this fellow away, Kvach. And keep a close watch on him—understand?

KVACH. Yes, sir. Come along, young man.

LEVSHIN (*affectionately*). Good-by, Pavel. Good-by, son.

YAGODIN (*grimly*). Good-by, Pavel, my boy.

RYABTSOV. Good-by. It's all right.

BOBOYEDOV (*to* LEVSHIN). Do you know him, old man?

LEVSHIN. Naturally. We work together.

BOBOYEDOV. What's your name?

LEVSHIN. Yefim Levshin.

BOBOYEDOV (*to* TATYANA, *in a low voice*). Just watch this. I want you, Levshin, to tell me the truth—you're a sensible old man, so you realize you must speak only the truth to a representative of the authorities—

LEVSHIN. Why tell lies?

BOBOYEDOV (*highly pleased*). Good. Now tell me honestly, what have you got hidden behind the icons in your house? Tell the truth.

LEVSHIN (*calmly*). I haven't got anything.

BOBOYEDOV. Is that the truth?

LEVSHIN. It must be.

BOBOYEDOV. Oh, Levshin, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You've turned bald, and your hair is gray, and still you lie like a boy. Don't you realize that the authorities know not only what you do but even what you think? That's bad, Levshin. Now what's this I'm holding in my hand?

LEVSHIN. I can't see very well—my eyesight isn't too good.

BOBOYEDOV. I'll tell you—these are pamphlets forbidden by the government, which call upon people to rise against their sovereign. These pamphlets were found behind the icons in your house. Well?

LEVSHIN (*calmly*). I see.

BOBOYEDOV. Do you admit they are yours?

LEVSHIN. Maybe they are mine. They all look alike.

BOBOYEDOV. Then why do you, at your age, tell lies?

LEVSHIN. Why, sir, I told you the absolute truth. You asked me what was behind the icons. And if you're asking me that, then there's nothing there—it's been taken out. And that's what I told you. There's nothing there. There was no call to shame me. I didn't deserve it.

BOBOYEDOV (*abashed*). Oh, so? Well, let's have less of your talk—I'm not standing for any nonsense. Who gave you these pamphlets?

LEVSHIN. Why should you know that? I won't tell you that. I don't even remember where they came from. No, you better not trouble yourself about that.

BOBOYEDOV. Oh, so? All right. Alexey Grekov. Which one is Grekov?

GREKOV. That's me.

BOBOYEDOV. Did you come under investigation in connection with revolutionary propaganda among the workers at Smolensk?

GREKOV. I did.

BOBOYEDOV. Talents like these at such a young age? Glad to make your acquaintance. Oh, it's too stuffy here. Gendarmes, take the men out on the veranda. (*Checking the prisoners by the list in his hand.*) Vyrypayev, Yakov? I see. Svistov, Andrey?

The gendarmes lead the arrested men to the veranda. BOBOYEDOV, *papers in hand, follows them.*

YAKOV (*quietly*). I like these men.

TATYANA. Yes. But why are they so simple? Why do they talk so simply, look at things so simply? Is it because they have no passion, no heroism in them?

YAKOV. They have a calm faith in their rightness.

TATYANA. I'm sure they have passion—and I'm sure they have heroes. But at this point you get the feeling they despise everybody.

YAKOV. Levshin is a fine fellow. What understanding eyes he has, so sad and so caressing! He seems to be saying, "Why all this? Why don't you step aside and give us freedom?"

ZAKHAR *peeps in through the door.*

ZAKHAR. These representatives of the law are amazingly stupid. They've set up a tribunal here—Nikolay struts about with the air of a conqueror—

YAKOV. What is it that bothers you, Zakhar—only the fact that all this business is taking place before your eyes?

ZAKHAR. Of course. They could have spared me this pleasure. Nadya has gone completely berserk. She's been making insolent remarks to Polina and me, she called Cleopatra a shark, and now she's rolling on the divan blubbering. God knows what's going on here.

YAKOV (*reflectively*). As for me, Zakhar, I begin to get more and more disgusted with the meaning of what's going on.

ZAKHAR. Yes, I understand. But what can we do? If you're attacked, you have to defend yourself. I simply can't find a place for myself in this house—it's as though everything had been turned upside down. It's damp today, cold—this rain! Autumn is coming on early.

ZAKHAR *goes off. Enter* NIKOLAY *and* CLEOPATRA, *both agitated.*

NIKOLAY. I'm convinced now that he's been paid to do it.

CLEOPATRA. They couldn't have thought it up themselves. You have to look for the hand of a clever man here.

NIKOLAY. You mean Sintsov?

CLEOPATRA. Who else? Here's Captain Boboyedov—

BOBOYEDOV (*from the veranda*). At your service.

NIKOLAY. I'm thoroughly convinced now that the boy has been bribed. (*He continues in a whisper.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*in a low voice*). Oh? H'mm—

CLEOPATRA (*to* BOBOYEDOV). You do see, don't you?

BOBOYEDOV. Y-yes— What scoundrels!

Continuing this conversation, NIKOLAY *and* BOBOYEDOV *disappear into the next room.* CLEOPATRA, *glancing around, notices* TATYANA.

CLEOPATRA. Oh, you're here?

TATYANA. Has anything new happened?

CLEOPATRA. I don't think it will interest you. Have you heard about Sintsov?

TATYANA. I know all that. YAKOV *leaves the room.*

CLEOPATRA (*challengingly*). Yes, he's under arrest. I'm glad all these weeds have been pulled up out of the factory at last. Aren't you glad?

TATYANA. I doubt whether you care much how I feel.

CLEOPATRA (*with malicious joy*). You rather liked this Sintsov. (*As she stares at* TATYANA, *her face grows softer.*) What a strange look you have. Your face seems to be worn out too. What's the matter?

TATYANA. It's probably the weather.

CLEOPATRA (*going over to her*). Look—perhaps it's stupid, but I'm a forthright person. I've lived through a lot of things. I've felt a lot

too—and that's made me bitter. I know only a woman can be a friend to another woman—

TATYANA. Did you want to ask me something?

CLEOPATRA. To tell you, not ask. I like you. You're so free, always so smartly dressed—and you hold your own so well with men. I envy you the way you talk and walk. But at times I don't like you—even hate you.

TATYANA. That's interesting. Why?

CLEOPATRA. Who are you, anyway?

TATYANA. What do you mean?

CLEOPATRA. I can't make you out. I want to see everybody completely defined. I like to know what a person wants. In my opinion, people who don't have a clear idea of what they want are dangerous. They can't be trusted.

TATYANA. Such strange talk. Why do I need to know your opinions?

CLEOPATRA (*intensely, in a tone tinged with alarm*). We all need to live closely, like one family, so we can trust one another. You see they're beginning to kill us, to rob us. Have you noticed what cutthroat faces those prisoners have? They know what they want—they certainly do. And they live like one family, they trust one another. I hate them. I fear them. Yet we all live fighting one another, without faith in anything, without any common ties, each going his own way. We rely on gendarmes and soldiers, they rely on themselves, and they're stronger than we are.

TATYANA. I, too, would like to ask you a straight question. Were you happy with your husband?

CLEOPATRA. Why do you want to know that?

TATYANA. I'm just curious.

CLEOPATRA (*after a pause*). No. He was always busy with outside things. *Enter* POLINA.

POLINA. Have you heard? That clerk Sintsov has turned out to be a socialist. And Zakhar was always so open with him and even wanted to make him an assistant bookkeeper. Mere trifles, of course, but think how difficult life is becoming. Right beside you are people who are your enemies by conviction, but you fail to recognize them.

TATYANA. I'm glad I'm not rich.

POLINA. I'd like to hear you say that when you're old. (*To* CLEOPATRA, *softly.*) Cleopatra Petrovna, your dressmaker wants you to try on your dress again. And they've also sent you some black crepe—

CLEOPATRA. I'm coming. My pulse has been fluttering. I dislike being ill.

POLINA. I can give you some drops for the palpitations. They help.

CLEOPATRA. Thank you. (*She goes off.*)

POLINA (*after her*). I'll be right with you. (*To* TATYANA.) One has to be gentle with her, it calms her. I'm glad you've had a talk with her. And generally speaking, I envy you, Tanya—you're always able

to take up such a convenient middle position. Well, I'll go give her some drops.

Polina goes off. Tatyana looks out at the prisoners on the veranda. Yakov peeps through the door.

Yakov (*with a broad smile*). You know, I was standing behind the door listening.

Tatyana (*distractedly*). They say it's not nice—to eavesdrop.

Yakov. It's not wise to listen to what people say in any case. You feel sorry for them. Now listen, Tanya, I'm going away.

Tatyana. Where to?

Yakov. Anywhere. I don't know myself yet. Good-by.

Tatyana (*gently*). Good-by. Write to me.

Yakov. It's awfully unpleasant here.

Tatyana. When are you leaving?

Yakov (*with a strange smile*). Today. You ought to go too—eh?

Tatyana. Yes, I'll go. Why are you smiling?

Yakov. Oh—because. We may never meet again.

Tatyana. Nonsense.

Yakov. Well, forgive me. (Tatyana *kisses him on the forehead. He laughs quietly, pushing her away.*) You kissed me as if I were dead.

He walks off slowly. Tatyana *looks after him and makes a movement to follow, but checks herself with a slight wave of her hand.* Nadya *comes in, carrying an umbrella.*

Nadya. Please, come out with me into the garden, Auntie. I have a headache. I've just been crying and crying—like a fool. If I go alone, I'll start to cry again.

Tatyana. What's there to cry about, my girl? Nothing.

Nadya. It's so annoying. I can't understand a thing. Who's in the right? Uncle says he is—but I don't feel it. Is Uncle kind? I was sure he was. Now I don't know. When he talks to me I begin to seem spiteful and stupid to myself. But when I begin to think about him—and ask myself all sorts of questions—I just feel lost.

Tatyana (*sadly*). If you start asking yourself questions, you'll turn into a revolutionist—and be destroyed in this chaos, my darling.

Nadya. One has to be something. (Tatyana *laughs quietly.*) Why do you laugh? One has to be. One can't live and blink his eyes, understanding nothing.

Tatyana. I laughed because everybody's been saying that today—everybody all of a sudden.

As they start to move off, the General *and the* Lieutenant *enter. The* Lieutenant *smartly makes way for the ladies.*

General. The mobilization is necessary, Lieutenant. It has a double purpose. (*To* Nadya *and* Tatyana.) Where are you off to?

Tatyana. For a stroll.

GENERAL. If you meet that clerk—what's his name? Lieutenant, what's the name of the man I introduced to you today?

LIEUTENANT. Polo—Pollute-sky, I think, Your Excellency.

GENERAL (*to* TATYANA). Send him over to me—I'll be in the dining room drinking tea with cognac and with the Lieutenant— Ho-ho-ho! (*Looks around, covering his mouth with his hand.*) Thank you, Lieutenant. You have a good memory. An excellent thing to have. An officer must remember the name and face of every man in his company. A soldier who's just been drafted is a cunning animal—a cunning, lazy, and stupid animal. The officer gets inside his soul and turns everything there the way he wants—he makes an animal into a man who is intelligent and loyal to his duty—

ZAKHAR *comes in, looking worried.*

ZAKHAR. Have you seen Yakov, Uncle?

GENERAL. I haven't seen Yakov. Is there some tea in there?

ZAKHAR. Yes.

The GENERAL *and the* LIEUTENANT *go off.* KON, *looking angry and disheveled, enters from the veranda.*

Have you seen my brother, Kon?

KON (*severely*). No. I'm through telling people things. If I see a man, I won't say anything. I'll hold my tongue. No more. I've done enough talking in my life— *Enter* POLINA.

POLINA. The peasants have just come. They're asking for more time to pay their rent.

ZAKHAR. What next! They certainly picked a moment—

POLINA. They're complaining that the crops have been bad and they have no money.

ZAKHAR. They're always complaining. Have you run into Yakov anywhere?

POLINA. No. What am I to tell them then?

ZAKHAR. The peasants? Let them go to the office. I don't want to see them.

POLINA. But there's nobody in the office. You know yourself this house is in a state of complete anarchy. It's almost dinner time, but this Captain keeps asking for tea. The samovar has been in the dining room since morning, and all in all our life seems to have turned into some kind of a circus.

ZAKHAR. You know, Yakov has suddenly decided to go away somewhere.

POLINA. You'll forgive me, but really I'm glad he's leaving.

ZAKHAR. Yes, of course. He's very irritating—talks awful nonsense. Just a few minutes ago he got hold of me and began asking if my revolver was any good for shooting crows. He went on very insolently and then walked off with the revolver— Always drunk—

From the veranda enter SINTSOV, *escorted by two gendarmes, and* KVACH. POLINA *gives* SINTSOV *a silent look through her*

lorgnette and walks off. ZAKHAR *adjusts his spectacles with some embarrassment and moves aside.*

Well, Mr. Sintsov—it's all so sad. I'm very, very sorry for you.

SINTSOV (*with a smile*). Don't trouble—it's not worth it.

ZAKHAR. Yes, it is. People must feel sympathy for one another. Even if a man I trust has not justified my trust, all the same, seeing him struck by misfortune, I deem it my duty to feel sympathy for him—yes. Good-by, Mr. Sintsov.

SINTSOV. Good-by.

ZAKHAR. Have you any—grievances against me?

SINTSOV. Not a thing.

ZAKHAR (*abashed*). That's fine. Good-by. Your salary will be forwarded to you—yes. (*Speaking to himself, as he walks off.*) But this is impossible. My house has been turned into an office of the secret police.

SINTSOV *half laughs. All this time* KVACH *has been regarding him intently, paying particular attention to his hands. Noticing this,* SINTSOV *fixes* KVACH *with his eyes for a few seconds.* KVACH *chuckles.*

SINTSOV. Well? What's the matter?

KVACH. Oh, it's nothing—nothing at all. *Enter* BOBOYEDOV.

BOBOYEDOV. Mr. Sintsov, you will presently proceed to town.

KVACH (*joyfully*). Sir, he's not Mr. Sintsov at all, but quite a different article.

BOBOYEDOV. What's that? Explain yourself.

KVACH. I know the gentleman. He used to be at the Bryansk works and his name there was Maxim Markov. We arrested him there two years ago, sir. On his left hand, on the thumb, he has no nail. I know. He must have escaped from some place if he's living under a different name.

BOBOYEDOV (*pleasantly surprised*). Is this true, Mr. Sintsov?

KVACH. It's all true, sir.

BOBOYEDOV. So you are not Sintsov, my—my!

SINTSOV. Whoever I may be, you have to be civil with me—don't forget that.

BOBOYEDOV. My, my! One can see at once one's dealing with a man who means business. Kvach, you'll take him to town yourself. And watch out!

KVACH. Yes, sir.

BOBOYEDOV (*happily*). Well then, Mr. Sintsov, or whatever your name is, you're going to town. You, Kvach, will immediately make a report to the chief, telling all you know about him. The file on the old case is to be asked for immediately—however, I'll do that myself. Wait here, Kvach. (*Goes off hurriedly.*)

KVACH (*good-humoredly*). So we meet again?

SINTSOV (*smiling*). Are you pleased?

KVACH. Of course, an old acquaintance.

SINTSOV (*disdainfully*). It's time you gave up this business. You with your gray hairs, tracking down people like a hound. Don't you find it humiliating?

KVACH (*good-humoredly*). It's all right, I'm used to it. I've held this job for twenty-three years. And I'm not a hound. My superiors respect me—they've promised me a medal. I'll get it now.

SINTSOV. For me?

KVACH. For you. Where did you escape from?

SINTSOV. You'll find out in due time.

KVACH. We certainly will. Do you remember there used to be a man at the Bryansk works—he was dark and wore spectacles? Savitsky was his name, a teacher? He was arrested again recently too. Only he died in prison. He was very sick. There aren't very many of you, I must say.

SINTSOV. There will be—you just wait.

KVACH. Oh? That's fine. The more political offenders there are, the better for us.

SINTSOV. You'll be getting awards more often?

BOBOYEDOV, *the* GENERAL, *the* LIEUTENANT, CLEOPATRA, *and* NIKOLAY *appear at the door.*

NIKOLAY (*glancing at* SINTSOV). I felt it. (*He disappears.*)

GENERAL. Fine specimen, isn't he?

CLEOPATRA. Now one can understand where it all came from.

SINTSOV (*ironically*). Look here, monsieur gendarme, don't you think your behavior is stupid?

BOBOYEDOV. Don't give me lessons!

SINTSOV (*insistently*). Yes, I will give you lessons. Stop this idiotic show!

GENERAL. Well, I like that!

BOBOYEDOV (*shouting*). Kvach, take him out.

KVACH. Yes, sir. (*Leads* SINTSOV *off.*)

GENERAL. He must be a wild animal, eh? How he—roars, eh?

CLEOPATRA. I'm convinced he's at the bottom of everything.

BOBOYEDOV. It's possible—very possible.

LIEUTENANT. He will be tried, I take it?

BOBOYEDOV (*with a chuckle*). We eat them without any legal sauce —and it's a treat, I tell you.

GENERAL. That's clever. Like oysters— (*With a snap of his jaws.*) Op! *Enter* KON.

BOBOYEDOV. Exactly. Well, Your Excellency, now we'll quickly sort out the game and you won't be bothered with this comedy any longer. Nikolay Vassilyevich, where are you?

All except KON *withdraw. The* POLICE INSPECTOR *enters from the veranda.*

POLICE INSPECTOR (*to* KON). Are the prisoners to be questioned here?

KON (*sullenly*). I don't know. I don't know anything.

POLICE INSPECTOR. Table—papers—it must be here. (*Calls out to the veranda.*) Bring them all in. (*To* KON.) The dead man made a mistake. He said a red-haired man shot him, but it turns out it was a dark-haired one.

KON (*muttering*). Live men too make mistakes.

The arrested men are brought in from the veranda.

POLICE INSPECTOR. Let them stand here—in a line. You stand at the end, old man. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Old buzzard!

GREKOV. Why do you swear at people?

LEVSHIN. Never mind, Alyosha. Let him—

POLICE INSPECTOR (*threateningly*). Shut up, you there, or I'll—

LEVSHIN. Never mind. That's the kind of job he has—hurting people.

The BARDIN *family and their guests return.* NIKOLAY *and* BOBOYEDOV *seat themselves at the table. The* GENERAL *takes the armchair in the corner. The* LIEUTENANT *stands behind him.* CLEOPATRA *and* POLINA *stand at the door, with* TATYANA *and* NADYA *behind them.* ZAKHAR *looks over their shoulders, with an expression of displeasure on his face.* POLOGHY *appears from somewhere, sidling in cautiously, bows to* NIKOLAY *and* BOBOYEDOV, *and stops in the middle of the room, not knowing what to do next. The* GENERAL *beckons to him with his finger, and* POLOGHY *tiptoes over to the* GENERAL *and takes his stand beside him. The gendarmes bring* RYABTSOV *in.*

NIKOLAY. Let's start. Pavel Ryabtsov.

RYABTSOV. Well?

BOBOYEDOV. Not well, fool, but yes, sir.

NIKOLAY. So you insist that it was you who killed the director?

RYABTSOV. I said I did it, so what more is there to say?

NIKOLAY. Do you know Alexey Grekov?

RYABTSOV. Which one is he?

NIKOLAY. The one standing next to you.

RYABTSOV. He works in our factory.

NIKOLAY. Then you and he are acquaintances?

RYABTSOV. We're all acquaintances.

NIKOLAY. Of course. But you've visited his house, gone out for walks with him—in short, you know each other well, you're friends?

RYABTSOV. I walk with everybody. We're all friends.

NIKOLAY. Are you? I think you're lying. Mr. Pologhy, tell us—what are the relations between Ryabtsov and Grekov?

POLOGHY. They are relations of close friendship. There are two cliques here. The young people are headed by Grekov, a young man who's extremely ill mannered toward anybody in a superior position.

The middle-aged are led by Yefim Levshin, a man utterly fantastic in his speech and foxlike in his ways—

NADYA (*quietly*). Oh, what a beast!

POLOGHY *glances at her and looks questioningly at* NIKOLAY. *The latter also casts a glance in* NADYA'S *direction.*

NIKOLAY. Well, go on.

POLOGHY (*with a sigh*). The link between them is Mr. Sintsov, who keeps on good terms with everybody. This person has little resemblance to an ordinary man with a normal mind. He reads different books and has his own opinion about everything. In his house, which is diagonally opposite mine and which has three rooms—

NIKOLAY. You don't have to go into all these details.

POLOGHY. Please excuse me. Truth demands completeness of form. His house is visited by all kinds of people, including those who are present here, such as Grekov—

NIKOLAY. Is this true, Grekov?

GREKOV (*calmly*). I'll ask you not to address any questions to me—I'm not going to answer them.

NIKOLAY. I'm sorry to hear that.

NADYA (*loudly*). Oh, good!

CLEOPATRA. This is outrageous!

POLINA. Nadya, my dear—

BOBOYEDOV. Sh-sh— *There is a noise on the veranda.*

NIKOLAY. I consider the presence of outsiders here unnecessary.

GENERAL. H'm— Who are the outsiders?

BOBOYEDOV. Kvach, go see what that noise is out there.

KVACH. A man is trying to break in, sir. He's throwing himself against the door and cursing, sir.

NIKOLAY. What does he want? Who is he?

BOBOYEDOV. Go find out, Kvach. KVACH *goes out.*

POLOGHY. Do you want me to continue or shall I stop?

NADYA. Oh, the dirty rat!

NIKOLAY. Stop, please. I'll ask the outsiders to leave the room.

GENERAL. How am I to understand that?

NADYA (*shouting defiantly*). You're the outsiders here, not I. You're outsiders everywhere—I'm in my own home. It's I who can demand that you leave the room—

ZAKHAR (*to* NADYA, *agitatedly*). You'd better go. Immediately. Go on.

NADYA. Indeed? In that case I'm truly an outsider here. All right, I'll go. But I'll tell you first—

POLINA. Stop her. She'll say something terrible!

NIKOLAY (*to* BOBOYEDOV). Tell your men to shut the door.

NADYA. You're all miserable, wretched men, without any conscience or heart— KVACH *returns.*

KVACH (*joyfully*). Sir, one more has been discovered.

BOBOYEDOV. What?

KVACH. One more murderer has shown up.

Enter AKIMOV. *A redhaired fellow, with a big mustache, he proceeds unhurriedly to the table.*

NIKOLAY (*rising involuntarily*). What do you want?

AKIMOV. I'm the one who killed the director.

NIKOLAY. You?

AKIMOV. I.

CLEOPATRA (*quietly*). Oh, you scum! So now your conscience is bothering you!

POLINA. My God! What terrible people!

TATYANA (*calmly*). These people will win out in the end!

AKIMOV (*sullenly*). Well, here I am. Eat me up!

General confusion. NIKOLAY *quickly whispers something to* BOBOYEDOV, *who listens to him with a perplexed smile. The prisoners stand silent and motionless.* NADYA, *in the doorway, gazes at* AKIMOV *and cries.* POLINA *and* ZAKHAR *converse in whispers. In the stillness* TATYANA'S *low-pitched voice can be heard.*

TATYANA (*to* NADYA). Don't cry. These people will win out in the end!

NIKOLAY. Well, Mr. Ryabtsov, what have you to say now?

RYABTSOV (*embarrassedly*). Why, nothing.

AKIMOV. Don't say anything, Pavel, keep quiet!

LEVSHIN (*joyfully*). Ah, my dear boys!

NIKOLAY (*banging his fist on the table*). Quiet!

AKIMOV (*calmly*). Don't shout, mister! We're not shouting.

NADYA (*to* AKIMOV, *in a loud voice*). Listen to me, you didn't kill that man. It's they who kill everybody—they kill all life by their greed—by their cowardice! (*To all.*) It's you who are the criminals!

LEVSHIN (*with feeling*). You're right, young lady. It's not the one that strikes who kills, but the one that plants bitter hatred. You're right, my dear. (*General confusion and hubbub.*) Ah, Akimov, you shouldn't have done it!

BOBOYEDOV. Silence!

NADYA (*to* AKIMOV). Why did you do it? Why?

LEVSHIN. Don't shout, sir. I'm an older man than you.

AKIMOV (*to* NADYA). You can't understand anything that's going on. You ought to leave us alone.

CLEOPATRA. And what saintly airs he put on, that vile old man!

BOBOYEDOV. Kvach!

LEVSHIN. Well, Akimov, why don't you talk? Tell them he put the pistol against your breast, and then you—why, then you turned it—

BOBOYEDOV (*to* NIKOLAY). Do you hear how he's prompting him? Oh, you old liar!

LEVSHIN. No, I'm not a liar—

NIKOLAY. Well, what do you say now, Ryabtsov?

RYABTSOV. Why, nothing.

LEVSHIN. Just hold your tongue. They're cunning. They're better with words than we are.

NIKOLAY (*to* BOBOYEDOV). Throw him out!

LEVSHIN. You can't throw us out, oh, no! No more of that. We've lived long enough in dark lawlessness. We've caught fire now, and you'll never put that light out. No matter what you do, you'll never stamp us out with fear—never!

CURTAIN

QUEER PEOPLE

THROUGHOUT the play the cheerful acceptance of life and the optimistic faith in the Russian people which are expressed by the writer Mastakov are subjected to criticism by other characters who quote the record of Russian history. Arguments for a skeptical or even cynical attitude toward the Russian people are drawn from two failures of the Russian intelligentsia to establish its political and spiritual leadership over the masses of the people. The first failure is associated with the movement known as "going to the people" which swept the Russian intelligentsia in the 'sixties and 'seventies of the last century. Following the abolition of serfdom, large numbers of young intellectuals were carried away by the ideas of political freedom and economic equality advocated by the revolutionary writers of that era, and undertook to spread them among the masses of Russian peasantry. They went to live among the peasants, and assuming their ways to win their confidence, tried to convert them to the new ideas. They found few followers, and not infrequently were handed over to the Tsarist police by the very people they came to save. The indifference of the peasants to the revolutionary propaganda became obvious after the assassination of Alexander II, when no strong popular movement came to the support of the revolutionists. Another failure of the intelligentsia, though of a different kind, marked the revolutionary upheaval of 1905–6. Here the disillusionment was caused not only by the ability of the government to suppress the revolutionary movement, but even more so by some excesses which accompanied the popular upheaval, such as wholesale and often brutal destruction of landowners' estates by the peasants and the widespread holdups which were carried out under revolutionary disguises. At the time "Queer People" was written (1910) the Russian intelligentsia was still in the grip of this disillusionment.

A. B.

QUEER PEOPLE

CHARACTERS

Dr. Nikolay Potekhin
Constantin Lukich Mastakov, a writer
Olga Vladimirovna
Vukol Potekhin, the Doctor's father, a land surveyor
Sasha, maid in the Mastakovs' house
Miron Samokvassov, an ex-army and ex-police officer
Zina Medvedeva
Elena, wife of Mastakov
Vassya Turitsin, Zina's fiancé
Medvedeva, Zina's mother
Taisya

A NOTE TO THE ACTORS

Mastakov—is sincere at any given moment. When carried away, speaks simply, without pathos or affectation, his eyes fixed on the face of his interlocutor. When out of temper, is helpless and slightly comic. Moves his hands gracefully and has a lithe body. Can be unconsciously coquettish. Listening to other people, cocks his head to one side and gazes at them with one eye, like a bird.

Vukol Potekhin—looks as if he has lost something but does not want others to notice it. His jesting is tiresome. His efforts to amuse people conceal his senile indifference to them. Feels lonesome and, when an opportunity offers itself, takes it out on those around him. But when listened to by others is pleased with the attention shown him, looks younger, and becomes simpler and more likable.

Nikolay Potekhin—is broodingly sullen. Regards other people with indifference, likes bearing down on them, parading his moroseness. Regards himself as being profound and complex. Through excess of egotism is incapable of love. His attitude toward Elena is compounded of sensual infatuation and jealousy of Mastakov. In his last scene has the sincerity of one who has been defeated.

Samokvassov—a kind man, lacking in character. Tired of himself, is looking for someone to take him in hand. Never forgets his past

and feels embarrassed among people he meets at close range for the first time and finds it difficult to understand. Dr. Potekhin inspires in him an antipathy bordering on physical revulsion. Carries himself like a military man, often overstressing it.

VASSYA TURITSIN—narrows his eyes in the hope of appearing more intelligent and biting.

ELENA—loves her husband deeply and honestly. Is convinced that in her position she can behave in no other way than she does. Is also aware that in this game she will, sooner or later, lose everything. Her reserve is only on the surface—inwardly she is burning all the time. Is lissome in figure, and is dressed simply but with taste.

OLGA—is past thirty. An adventuress in a hurry to find something stable. Has had too much experience to believe people or eat out her heart over failures. Feels at sea confronting Elena, unable to understand her method of self-defense. Her hastiness prevents her from being more steadfast—from seeing through Elena's tactics. Is by no means blatant, but more stylish than Elena, and, of course, more experienced.

ZINA—a girl who has not the courage to be herself. Is charming and attractive.

SASHA—has the grave, almost stern, countenance of one who has known much sorrow and privation.

ACT I

A summer house in a pine forest. Through the widely spaced trees one can see the front of the house with two windows screened with gauze, a door, and a low veranda. Downstage, a table built around the trunk of a tall pine tree, a rocking chair, several wicker chairs, and a hammock.

It is late on a moonlit night. At rise, the gray figure of DR. NIKOLAY POTEKHIN *is seen among the trees. He wears a loose coat and a hat. Looking in the direction of the house he listens for a few moments, then, with a shrug, goes off unhurriedly left. A few seconds later* MASTAKOV *and* OLGA *appear on the veranda and come down, crossing diagonally to right.*

MASTAKOV (*in an undertone, as he joyfully kisses* OLGA'S *hands*). You're so kind—so sweet—

OLGA (*glancing about*). Hush! I hear steps—

MASTAKOV. There's nobody in. Nikolay is in town, Elena at the Medvedevs'. Only the land surveyor is in his room. But he's busy looking for contradictions and isn't interested in anything else. (*Kissing* OLGA *on the cheek.*) You'll see, I'll write a hilarious story about him—

OLGA. Well, I'm going. Don't see me off—

MASTAKOV. Wait. Sit a while with me. I'd like to tell you—

OLGA (*searchingly*). Aren't you afraid somebody may see us?

MASTAKOV. I feel happy with you—at ease—I'm loath to let you go—

OLGA. Is that so? It took you quite a while to notice I was in love with you. Now it's my turn to keep away from you—

MASTAKOV. Oh, it's wonderful how simple, easy, and beautiful it all is!

OLGA (*disengaging her arm*). Well, good-by—until tomorrow!

MASTAKOV. No, wait—let me tell you something—

OLGA. Quiet. Don't shout.

They go off right. The housemaid SASHA *emerges from around the corner of the house and gazes after them.* MASTAKOV *returns, smiling gently, gesticulating. From left comes* DR. POTEKHIN, *his hat pulled over his eyebrows, his hands behind his back.*

DR. POTEKHIN (*suspiciously*). Whom were you seeing off?

MASTAKOV (*after a pause, with a smile*). I don't know.

DR. POTEKHIN. And kissing?

MASTAKOV (*embarrassed, laughingly*). Kissing! One doesn't ask such questions, my friend.

DR. POTEKHIN (*insistently*). I believe I saw—

MASTAKOV (*quickly*). You often see strange things. Have you just returned from town? What's new there?

DR. POTEKHIN. Nothing, naturally.

MASTAKOV. And in the papers?

DR. POTEKHIN. There are two articles about you—

MASTAKOV. Laudatory?

DR. POTEKHIN (*with a smile*). Well, no, not very. Rather abusive.

MASTAKOV (*seating himself in the hammock*). Then I don't have to read them.

DR. POTEKHIN (*in a dull tone*). Do you read only praises?

MASTAKOV. It's small pleasure to read when they pan you, and it's harmful when they praise. Praises inspire dangerous ideas—you know what I mean— (*Makes rings with his fingers over his head.*) The first time I was called a talented writer I went out and bought myself such a hideous necktie that my wife— (*sighs*) teased the life out of me.

DR. POTEKHIN. Where is she?

MASTAKOV (*glancing around*). Gone to the Medvedevs'. Zina's fiancé is very bad.

DR. POTEKHIN. He'll die.

MASTAKOV. Probably. So will you in due time.

DR. POTEKHIN (*thinking of something else*). Well, it won't be so soon for you and me. But it'll be pretty soon for him. It's disagreeable to die when one is young.

MASTAKOV (*slightly annoyed*). I've heard this aphorism before, I believe.

DR. POTEKHIN (*in the same tone as before*). It's particularly disagreeable to die when one leaves behind a girl one is engaged to—

MASTAKOV. How do you know? You *are* a tiresome, peculiar man. Vassya knows that he hasn't long to live. But he doesn't groan, doesn't complain—does he? He manages to conceal his anguish— And this noble, fine restraint seems to irritate you—and others too. You walk around him and croak: He'll die—he's dying—

DR. POTEKHIN (*with a snicker*). You're blind—or, as usual, just making up things.

MASTAKOV. You know if this Vassya were to die with joy and laughter you would probably hate him.

DR. POTEKHIN (*muttering*). What nonsense—

MASTAKOV. You'd certainly say he had gone mad—

DR. POTEKHIN (*casually*). What time was Zina here?

MASTAKOV (*wearily*). At five—or thereabouts.

DR. POTEKHIN (*looking down*). Did Elena Nikolayevna leave with her?

MASTAKOV. Yes.

DR. POTEKHIN. And hasn't returned?

MASTAKOV. No.

DR. POTEKHIN. I see. H'm. Then you— (*In a low voice.*) Constantin, you and I are old schoolfellows—

MASTAKOV (*with a wave of his hand*). Go and rest, old schoolfellow. You're tired. You must spare yourself. Your cultural activity—

DR. POTEKHIN (*sullenly*). Stop fooling!

MASTAKOV. Run along. I know you. You want to talk about the tasks of literature, about compassion—

DR. POTEKHIN. Listen—this is serious—forget about literature—

MASTAKOV. Everything else is of no interest. Here's your father.

VUKOL POTEKHIN, in a short jacket and high boots, and wearing a hat, is seen standing on the veranda, gazing up at the sky.

Where are you off to? The moon?

VUKOL (*crossing down to them*). To catch quail.

MASTAKOV. You are an active man. I bow to you, surveyor. How does one catch quail?

VUKOL. Quail are caught with a net, in the rye—and men in contradictions.

MASTAKOV. Bravo! You coin aphorisms like a master. Listen and learn, Nikolay! And have you a book in your pocket?

The DOCTOR *lights a cigar and, making inconspicuous use of the match flame, studies* MASTAKOV'S *face intently. His cigar lit, he goes off right, into the wood, his shoulders lifted and his head bowed.*

VUKOL. I have. I'll have a dip at dawn, stretch myself on the dewy grass, and read for an hour or so. Fine, isn't it?

MASTAKOV. Marvelous—especially for your rheumatism.

VUKOL. The birds will sing, fulfilling the law of nature, and a man— (*slapping his book*) will tell me comforting tales about Holy Russia— (MASTAKOV *laughs*) about impecunious engineers, a policeman with a heart of gold, nihilists great in the simplicity of their souls, saintly priests, noble gentry, and—women, wise women! How pleasant it is to read such tales in our benighted, hopeless time, don't you think?

MASTAKOV (*with interest*). Do you like this author?

VUKOL. He's a great storyteller! His heart has dried up from despair and anguish, but he comforts his neighbors! I read him and smile affectionately— (*Winking.*) What a sweet fellow! I know that it's all made up and shouldn't make you feel better. But it's pleasant to read a man who sees nothing around him but beasts and parasites and says to himself: I'll sit down and draw them pictures of fine exemplary people—

MASTAKOV (*pensively and seriously*). Is that how you feel? It's interesting—

VUKOL. He's ripped up his soul into threads and has woven them into a soothing lie— (*Winking and smiling.*) He thought that would cheer the Russian heart. Cheer me? The poor fellow's missed me by a mile—

MASTAKOV. Missed? How so?

VUKOL (*raising his hand, as if taking an oath*). I don't believe him!

MASTAKOV. You old nihilist!

VUKOL. I don't believe him. This badly constructed and half-ruined temple which is called Russia can't be renovated by painting murals on its walls. Suppose we do paint them. Suppose we cover up the dirt and the dangerous cracks. What shall we gain? The dirt will come through, destroy the charming pictures—and once again you have rot and destruction.

MASTAKOV (*watching* VUKOL *with serious eyes, his head drooping like a bird's*). I see—

VUKOL. I don't believe him! But it makes my heart melt with admiration when a man disregards obvious facts for the kind purpose of bringing cheer and comfort to his neighbor. After all, we live not according to logic but as the spirit moves us. Now you too, like this author, contradict facts.

MASTAKOV. I?

VUKOL (*winking*). Yes, you. Don't you make up righteous characters that aren't to be found in the flesh in Russia? Don't you?

SASHA *comes down from the veranda and stands under the trees. With sad, reproachful eyes she gazes at* MASTAKOV.

MASTAKOV (*springing from the hammock*). That's not true. You lock up life in the cage of some generalization, in the belief that you'll be able to understand it better that way. But it's not true. (*With growing fervor.*) Nothing can be made up, nor is it necessary to make anything up—

VUKOL (*laughing*). Nothing? It's not necessary?

MASTAKOV. I believe that the good, the joyous, the human will win out. I look for such facts around me—and life gives them to me with a generous hand—

VUKOL. What does it give you? Kopecks? Peanuts?

MASTAKOV (*with warm conviction*). I like to point out what's good and bright in life and in man— I say life contains things that are beautiful—they spread and grow—let's lovingly nurture the growth of what's human. For the human is ours—it's what we've created ourselves.

VUKOL. Nobody will believe you. The Russian doesn't like to believe—belief imposes obligation. He prefers to submit to circumstances—he's too lazy. We're fond of saying, nothing can be done about it, don't stick your head in the lion's mouth. We live only six months a year. The other six we spend dreaming about the fine time, happy future, which we'll never attain.

MASTAKOV (*resuming his place in the hammock, as he notices* SASHA). What is it, Sasha?

SASHA (*with a start*). The mistress has ordered me to offer you tea—

MASTAKOV (*alarmed*). She's returned?

SASHA. No. She told me when she left to ask you at nine o'clock.

MASTAKOV. Will you have tea, pessimist? Bring two glasses, Sasha—and some bread.

VUKOL. Your wife does look after you!

MASTAKOV (*quietly*). Y-yes—

VUKOL. A most excellent woman.

MASTAKOV (*glancing around*). Take me to catch quail with you—

VUKOL. Fine. Come along.

MASTAKOV. Samokvassov is an interesting man, I believe, isn't he?

VUKOL. We are all interesting men. (SASHA *brings a tray with tea.*) We all should be of interest to you.

MASTAKOV (*stretching his hands over* VUKOL'S *head*). I conjure you to be that!

VUKOL (*chuckles, and drinks tea*). Yes, Samokvassov— The fellow's lost his bearings. Resigned as a captain in the army to join the police in order to help his sister. Then in 1905, during the revolutionary upheaval, gave up his job—said he could no longer stomach it— And now he's sorry he gave it up.

MASTAKOV (*with interest*). Sorry?

VUKOL. It seems so. He talks a lot about his stupidity— Here he comes.

Enter SAMOKVASSOV. *He wears a jacket of military cut, an officer's peaked cap, and high boots. Over his shoulder is a quail net, and in his hand he carries a cage with a canvas cover. Noticing* MASTAKOV, *he bows.*

SAMOKVASSOV. Good evening! We've chosen an excellent time for our expedition, surveyor. Have you read the newspapers?

VUKOL. You know I dislike them.

SAMOKVASSOV. Get over it. I have no liking for them either, but I swallow their dirty poison all the same.

VUKOL. Well, you're troubled by the Germans. Nobody troubles me. I don't believe in the Germans or in the Japanese.

MASTAKOV (*very courteously*). Have some tea. Sasha!

SASHA *silently goes off to the house.*

SAMOKVASSOV. Thank you. Are you also interested in international politics?

MASTAKOV. I? No. The style they write them up in is so abominable.

VUKOL. And it's always in prose. (*To* MASTAKOV, *pointing at* SAMOKVASSOV.) He's terribly afraid of Germans, Japanese, and I think women too. You are afraid of women, Miron, aren't you?

SAMOKVASSOV. I'm not afraid, but—I think this is no time for joking— It's about time we Russians looked in a serious way at our position in Europe. (*Getting slightly worked up.*) Never before has Russia found herself in such a dangerous, such a hopeless situation. I'm surprised that you, a writer, a spiritual guardian of the nation, so to speak— (MASTAKOV *stares at him smilingly, his head bent to one side.*

This embarrasses and rather irritates SAMOKVASSOV.) You should know all the dangers threatening our country—

MASTAKOV (*smiling, to* VUKOL). You see—here's another of my duties—

SAMOKVASSOV (*with feeling*). Is it permissible to joke when other nations want to use us as a barrier against the Mongols? Europe sits snugly, protected by the bulwark of Russia on the east, and when we are completely exhausted fighting the yellow race, Germany will seize Poland and the Baltic provinces from us, break through the Balkans to the Aegean Sea—

VUKOL. Grab Mars, Venus, the Polar star—

SAMOKVASSOV. If you'd been watching—

VUKOL. You're accustomed to watching and giving commands. You used to control the traffic in the streets, now you're reaching out for states. Drop it!

SAMOKVASSOV. Won't you understand, you strange fellow—

VUKOL. Drop your politics and buy a guitar. Play a guitar. It's a melancholy instrument and doesn't disturb the quiet. It will be a pleasant sight for a manly looking, mustachioed chap like you to sit beneath a window at the hour of sunset and play with an anguished heart on this sad instrument—

MASTAKOV. Bravo, surveyor. Charming.

SAMOKVASSOV (*sadly*). Oh, gentlemen!

VUKOL. While a heavy tear of loneliness is slowly running down your cheek onto your long gray mustache— MASTAKOV *laughs.*

SAMOKVASSOV. When are we going to be serious?

VUKOL. As soon as we begin catching quail.

MASTAKOV (*to* SAMOKVASSOV). Do you know that I'm joining you?

SAMOKVASSOV. I'm glad to hear it. All the same, the Germans demand our attention—

MASTAKOV. Really? But don't you know that the Europeans reproach us for overindulging in serious conversation?

VUKOL. The ladies are coming.

SAMOKVASSOV. It's you writers they reproach.

Enter, from left, ELENA *and* ZINA. SAMOKVASSOV *bows to them.*

ZINA (*to* SAMOKVASSOV). Don't be afraid—give me your paw. I don't bear you any grudge.

VUKOL. Moreover, that wasn't your last quarrel.

ZINA. Of course not.

SAMOKVASSOV (*embarrassed*). I'm—very, very glad!

ELENA *quietly comes over to her husband. With a guilty smile, he instinctively stretches out his hand to her.*

MASTAKOV. You've been out so long!

ELENA. Have you been lonesome?

MASTAKOV. These two have been ill-treating me with politics, philosophy, astronomy, and similar profundities. (*He notices a bunch of*

keys on a ring and a woman's glove in her hand, and frowns.) What's that you're holding? Whose is it?

ELENA (*with outward indifference*). Probably Olga Vladimirovna's. I picked them up on the road—stepped on them. Has she been here?

MASTAKOV. Yes, she has. Surveyor, are we leaving soon?

VUKOL (*glancing at his watch*). In—in half an hour.

MASTAKOV. I'm off to change. (*He goes in.*)

SAMOKVASSOV (*to* ZINA). It's pardonable in my case. I sometimes don't know the meaning of words. For example, I often see the word "myth." What does it mean?

ZINA. Myth? That's you.

SAMOKVASSOV. No, seriously.

ZINA. Seriously—it's you.

SAMOKVASSOV. No, how can I be? They talk of Greek mythology—how can that apply to me? I'm Russian.

ZINA (*laughing*). Oh, Lena! Just listen to this!

SAMOKVASSOV (*flaring up*). Yes, I understand that a man over forty asking childish questions is a comic spectacle to an educated girl—of twenty. (*He goes off quickly among the trees.*)

ELENA (*absorbed in thought and jingling the keys*). What is it? (*Quietly.*) Something seems to have made him cross again?

VUKOL. The young lady called him a myth. Called *him!*

ZINA (*smiling*). Is there anything offensive in that?

ELENA (*softly, to* VUKOL). Is it necessary to make him feel a stranger among us?

VUKOL. Bah! I'm almost friends with him. You're much too—delicate!

ELENA (*smiling*). And aren't you much too blunt—the way you treat him?

VUKOL. I have nothing to do with it. There's the person who always teases him. ELENA *goes off, unhurriedly, after* SAMOKVASSOV. See? I've been taken to task because of you. (ZINA *makes no comment.*) Well, how's the patient?

ZINA (*angrily*). You don't really want to know.

VUKOL. Why not?

ZINA. Because you're an unfeeling, coldhearted man.

VUKOL (*surprised*). Well, how do you like that!

ZINA (*somewhat embarrassed by her outburst*). Life is boring enough, and here you—

VUKOL. My dear child! At my age nobody's very happy, which is in the nature of things. But that you should be bored at the age of twenty—

ZINA. I'm not bored. My nerves are shot!

VUKOL. That's nothing in your favor either.

ZINA (*resentfully*). You don't understand. I've put in two years of strenuous effort to save a man, I've worn out my mother, and now

what? Here he is—a wreck, a half-dead invalid— Have you ever experienced that at the age of twenty?

DR. POTEKHIN *is approaching.*

Have you?

VUKOL. H'm—

ZINA (*to* DR. POTEKHIN). How is he?

DR. POTEKHIN. He's asleep. His temperature's dropped. Who's walking around down there?

ZINA. It's Elena and Samokvassov.

DR. POTEKHIN (*indifferently*). This father of mine has been teasing you, as usual?

ZINA. I think I was rude to him.

VUKOL (*considerately*). Don't worry about that. I have tough nerves. (*Withdrawing into the background.*) Miron! It's time to leave.

DR. POTEKHIN (*in a low voice*). Father is a trying man to talk to sometimes.

ZINA. I believe everybody plays a part. He's playing a misanthrope.

DR. POTEKHIN (*listening to* ELENA's *voice off stage*). He *is* a tiresome man. ELENA *and* SAMOKVASSOV *return.*

SAMOKVASSOV. I don't understand such a life.

ELENA. A little more consideration for each other, and everything will become understandable. MASTAKOV *comes out of the house.*

MASTAKOV. Well, what's it going to be? Quail or philosophy? (*To* ELENA.) I'm going. Don't worry.

ELENA (*with surprise*). About what?

SAMOKVASSOV. Well, let's go!

MASTAKOV (*somewhat embarrassed*). About what? About me, of course. (*Kissing* ELENA's *hand.*) Good-by.

ELENA. Till dawn?

MASTAKOV. Yes.

MASTAKOV, SAMOKVASSOV, *and* VUKOL *go off right.* ELENA, *as if surprised at her husband's kiss, slowly lowers her hand and gazes at it with a strange smile.* DR. POTEKHIN, *smoking a cigar, watches the expression on her face.* ZINA, *absorbed in thought and rocking in her chair, is quietly singing some sad song. From the distance* MASTAKOV's *laughter is heard.*

DR. POTEKHIN. A delightful night. It's so warm—

ELENA. Yes, it's fine.

DR. POTEKHIN (*in a low voice*). It's the third night I'm going to sleep outdoors—on the veranda, below the window—

ELENA. Aren't you bothered by gnats?

DR. POTEKHIN. No.

He sighs and glances around. The maid SASHA *is moving among the trees, watching* ELENA *intently. The others do not notice her.*

ZINA (*from her chair*). I'm going home. Whew, I'm tired—but I must go.

ELENA. If you like, the Doctor and I will walk down with you.

ZINA (*yawning slightly*). If you care to—and it's not too much trouble—

DR. POTEKHIN (*animatedly, but with some embarrassment*). Not at all. It'll be a pleasure—why, certainly.

ZINA. What a sudden outburst of politeness!

DR. POTEKHIN. Why politeness? Just that I don't feel like going to bed.

ZINA (*rising*). Really? Please forgive my error—

ELENA (*smiling*). Poor Doctor—he's blushing. By the way, this Samokvassov is an interesting man—but he's ill at ease among us.

DR. POTEKHIN. He has something in common with my father—

ZINA (*ironically*). They both suffer from boredom—because of nothing to do. Out of boredom they think of complicated questions—

ELENA. We're all a little bored, Zina, all of us think out of boredom.

DR. POTEKHIN. Well, one goes to the country for a rest—and resting, in itself, is not a joyful occupation.

They all go off. SASHA *comes forward and clears the table. Picking up* OLGA'S *bunch of keys and glove, she throws them back on the table with an expression of disgust and runs off after* ELENA.

SASHA (*shouting*). Elena Nikolayevna! Come back, please—just for a minute!

She disappears among the trees and presently returns with ELENA, *speaking quickly with tears and pain in her voice.*

Forgive me—I love you, but I'd better go—I can't bear it—

ELENA (*trying to conceal her alarm*). What's happened? Speak out, Sasha. Has anybody wronged you?

SASHA. No, not that. I don't know how to say it. You've taught me to think so well of Constantin Lukich, and now—I'm afraid to speak—

ELENA. Are you afraid of me?

SASHA (*running over to the table, picks up the keys and throws them at* ELENA'S *feet*). You see this? It's her keys—she forgot them.

ELENA (*in a low voice*). No. It's not true. I brought them here. I found them on the road—

SASHA (*crushed, quietly*). It makes no difference. She was here—they kissed—I'm ashamed to say what I saw— They—

ELENA (*leaning against a tree, draws herself up and speaks quietly, with anger and pride in her voice*). Go away! How dare you come between me and my husband, you wretched girl? And what you said is a lie!

SASHA (*imploringly*). It's not a lie—you know that yourself—you do!

ELENA. I don't want to know anything— You may go.

SASHA (*dropping into a chair and crying*). Oh, God! Oh, God!

ELENA (*regards the girl for a few seconds, then walks over to her and places a hand on her head*). Forgive me, Sasha— I said that out of shame—weakness— I know all—forgive me. It gave me a shock and

for a moment I almost lost my reason. It's stupid to show pride before you—

SASHA. Oh, God! Why—why did he do it? Is she better than you? You're such a fine person—

ELENA. Let's not go into that—what is there to say? I'm so sorry I hurt you—

SASHA. Oh, you hurt nobody! It's you who've been hurt!

ELENA. It's hard for me to believe it—I didn't want to face the truth—

SASHA. But I had to tell you—

ELENA. Yes, my dear child—

SASHA (*wearily*). Why did he do it?

ELENA. Let's not talk about it—I lost my head—

SASHA. You saw it coming. Why didn't you stop them?

ELENA. I? Let's say no more, Sasha. I can't talk— Bring me some water—and a shawl.

SASHA *goes off quickly.* ELENA *moves slowly back and forth, as if she were blind, and talks to herself in a low voice.*

You've expected this—haven't you? You've known it— Well?

A soft whistle is heard off right. ELENA *draws herself up and turns a stern gaze in the direction of the sound. From behind the trees comes* MASTAKOV. *He hurries over to his wife, speaking with tenderness and joy.*

MASTAKOV. Walking about? Alone? That's splendid. Let's sit for a while, I'm a little tired. (ELENA *makes a movement away from him, but he doesn't notice it.*) I ran away from them. I couldn't stand it. The one sees nothing but German machinations everywhere, the other wears himself out trying to say something important, original— They're both maniacs, and the devil with them! (*He takes* ELENA *by the arm and leads her to a seat, never noticing her weak attempts at resistance.*) I strolled through the fields and kept thinking of you—

ELENA (*quietly*). Of me? Did you?

MASTAKOV. Yes. I thought how good you are—

ELENA. Please, Constantin—don't—

MASTAKOV. Why not? I certainly will. Sometimes I feel I want to shower on you all the tender words I know—

ELENA (*glancing at his face, with fear*). Why are you saying these things?

MASTAKOV. Because I want to, and don't you interrupt me.

ELENA (*anxiously*). You want to tell me something? Is that it? Wait —please wait. No, you'd better say it—say it quick!

MASTAKOV (*playing with her fingers*). Of course I will. You see. I love you with such a fine, quiet love—sometimes as if you were my mother, although you're the same age I am. Is that strange? But it's the truth, Lena!

ELENA (*prepared for a blow*). Yes. Well?

MASTAKOV. Sit down, and I'll stretch out and lay my head in your lap—

ELENA (*helplessly seating herself on the bench*). Wait—I'll help you say it—

MASTAKOV. Never mind. Now I'm fine. Who is it stamping his feet?

SASHA, *with a look of amazement, stops abruptly with a glass of water in her hand.*

ELENA. Sasha—give it to me— You may go. SASHA *goes off.*

MASTAKOV. This Sasha is a splendid girl. So elegant, intelligent, and like a piece of china. You did an excellent thing in placing her close to yourself—it's helping her realize her human dignity at a rapid rate—and that's precious. I have an urge to speak tender words to the whole world—out of the abundance of riches I feel within me. You're dripping something on me, Lena, as if it were tears falling—

ELENA. I'm sorry—

MASTAKOV. Well, there I was walking and thinking of you. Suddenly a story took shape in my mind—quite a good one, really. (*He laughs happily.*) Listen. There lives an old woman. She's wise—she sees that the people around her are all slaves. But she has faith in a better world—in a vague sort of way—and she has comic traits, too. Her husband is as much a slave as the rest. Her daughter is a silent, religious girl wrapped up in herself. A man appears in their village. He's a tramp, a homeless drudge, but he has a rebellious soul and glows like fire— He impresses the old woman. She sees that he's not a slave, not just a ruffian, but a man who longs for something better. So she says to her daughter, "Look—a good man has come to our village." (MASTAKOV *sits up with a start, gazes in front of him, and speaks, gesticulating, as if delirious.*) She's such a tall old woman—dark complexion, withered breasts, thin lips, and greenish eyes—quite a figure, I tell you. She believes that the children of her daughter and this man will be true human beings, brave and proud— She suggests to the tramp that he marry her daughter. Her husband is of course against it, and the man, too, doesn't want to lose his freedom—he doesn't want to, yet the girl has touched his heart. Then the old woman, after praying to God—you get this!—permits him and her daughter to live together without getting married. I know how to tell this episode—oh, yes! At night she goes down on her knees beseeching God to lay the burden of her daughter's sin on her: O Lord! May your image and your likeness not be degraded and defamed in man—not exactly these words, Lena, but this idea! She loves God and cannot see without sorrow and anger how the divine in man is trampled down—this is something I know! I know the feelings! Oh, yes! Then the father learns about his daughter's affair. He wants to beat her. Don't you dare! says the old woman, I'm to blame for this! I'm a mother, and I don't want my daughter, my flesh and blood, to give birth to wretched, insignificant people. I'm a mother! It's fine, Lena, isn't it?

ELENA (*quietly*). Yes, it is.

MASTAKOV. And possible?

ELENA (*in a low voice, with conviction*). Yes. It must become possible— And it will—you must go on asserting it.

MASTAKOV. Mother! Little is said of her, Lena—disgracefully little. Mothers of Goethes haven't been understood. Yet every woman who's a mother is almost a symbol. I'll write a lot about mothers— You know, there's something motherly in your attitude toward me? Sometimes I feel that with extraordinary force and clarity. Occasionally you're too serious—and it's a little boring, you know. You don't laugh enough, Lena. But, making up for all that, it's so peaceful, so easy being with you. Ah, thank you, Lena! Firm and unshaken is the earth upon which you tread—

ELENA (*panting with joy and sorrow*). Listen—in God's name—for the sake of your own soul, tell me the whole truth always—always! Lies are so vulgar—so unbecoming to you!

MASTAKOV. The truth? Sometimes it's utter trash that keeps swinging around your head like a bat—a gray, repulsive little lump of dirt —what good are these petty truths? What service do they perform? I could never understand their purpose. Well, they'll tell me—I know just what they'll tell me:—Your old woman is a lie, they will shout, there are no such women. But, Lena, there aren't today, yet there will be tomorrow. Do you believe there will be?

ELENA. I do. Help them into being, and there will be. But this is not the truth I was talking about. Perhaps, sometimes, you don't want to tell me something out of pity for me. For the sake of beauty which you love so much, don't show me any pity! It's humiliating—

MASTAKOV (*with great sincerity*). I don't pity you—not at all! (*He lays his head on her lap again.*) My darling Lena, today I feel extraordinarily close to you—

ELENA (*anxiously*). Today? Why especially today?

MASTAKOV (*closing his eyes*). I don't know—I won't tell you—although perhaps I can guess why. It's nice to hear the lively beating of your heart—

ELENA. Would you like me to help you—to say it for you?

MASTAKOV (*dozing off*). Wait—I want to be silent. How fine it is—quiet—and a fine heart, so loyal to me, is beating—beating—when I think of you—I always find something new—a new theme—idea—it's wonderful, Lena—

He falls asleep. SASHA *comes on carrying a white shawl.*

SASHA (*in a loud voice*). I'm sorry—I forgot about this—

ELENA (*in a whisper*). Sh-sh! He's asleep. (SASHA, *as she sees* MASTAKOV'S *pose, lowers her head.* ELENA *knits her brow.*) Cover his feet—quietly. (*With an involuntary smile.*) Look what a—dear face—

SASHA *slowly withdraws. Gently* ELENA *rocks her husband's head on her lap.* DR. POTEKHIN *comes on left, sees the figures on the*

bench, gazes at them intently, and then, drawing himself up, with a gloomy countenance, proceeds toward the house, shuffling his feet. ELENA *whispers anxiously:*

Quiet—

DR. POTEKHIN *turns his head toward her sharply, as if about to shout something, but instead waves his hand and walks in.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

Evening. The sun is setting. At the table under the pine tree are ELENA, *with an embroidery frame before her;* ZINA; VASSYA, *sitting in an armchair and wrapped in a rug; and* MASTAKOV, *holding a manuscript. Standing, and leaning against a tree, is* DR. POTEKHIN, *smoking. Sitting behind* ELENA *is* SASHA, *sewing something and bending over her work as if to make herself inconspicuous. From time to time* SASHA *casts glances, over* ELENA'S *shoulder, at* MASTAKOV—*her face sad as usual, her eyes reproachful.*

MASTAKOV (*striking the table several times with his manuscript, excited, and looking smilingly at each person in turn*). Well, you may pass your sentence now.

VASSYA. As one already condemned, I'll speak last. That's my privilege.

ZINA (*screwing up her face*). My, my! How gaily you joke! (*To* MASTAKOV.) I like it very much—particularly the daughter.

SASHA (*in a low voice*). I like the old woman.

MASTAKOV (*pleased*). Of course, you're an old witch yourself. (*To the* DOCTOR.) Now it's your turn. (*Inclining his head.*) Tear into it, villain.

DR. POTEKHIN (*reluctantly*). You know I'm a poor judge of art.

MASTAKOV. I can see I'll get it in the neck!

DR. POTEKHIN. Tales make little impression on me.

ELENA. Why tales?

MASTAKOV. Keep quiet, Lena. You mustn't talk. Go on, Nikolay. Let me have it!

DR. POTEKHIN. Don't rush me. I'm your reader. I didn't rush you when you were writing it.

ZINA. Lord, what a somber tone!

VASSYA. Doctor intends to treat the matter seriously. (*To* MASTAKOV.) Evidently, you're dangerously ill. What's his disease, esteemed Doctor?

DR. POTEKHIN (*with a laugh*). Poor eyesight.

VASSYA. Is he threatened with blindness?

ZINA. Be still.

DR. POTEKHIN. You know, Constantin, my father is probably right when he talks about you writers. (*Suddenly with bitterness, almost hatred.*) You deceive your readers, that's what you do. You give them not their daily bread but sweet cakes—

VASSYA. You seem to be losing your temper, Doctor.

DR. POTEKHIN (*forcefully*). Trying to raise hopes, you writers engender painful disappointments. At one time you had pictured the people as waiting for prophets of truth and goodness. The prophets believed you and went to the people. They were betrayed and murdered! Nothing daunted, you did it once again—deceived those who believed you. Instead of the mighty people whom you glorified, we were met by the same ancient, benighted brute—

ZINA (*indignantly*). Doctor, you're saying things that border on vulgarity.

VASSYA (*checking her*). Wait—have patience—

DR. POTEKHIN (*recovering a measure of self-control and passing his hand over his face*). Don't get excited—and don't be rude! I warned you—didn't I—this is not my opinion, but my father's.

VASSYA. You state other people's opinions with such force, though, it would be interesting to hear your own.

DR. POTEKHIN (*sullenly*). I have no opinions of my own. I've no desire to hide this fact, as is done by many people today. I've no gift for making up thoughts quickly— And I'm tired of the comedy of disguises, with nihilists turning into fanatics and fanatics into nihilists.

VASSYA. Like the proverbial Englishman, you're not rich enough to buy clothes of poor quality? That's laudable.

ZINA (*to* ELENA). The discussion is taking on a rather hysterical tinge. ELENA *checks her with a glance.*

MASTAKOV (*somewhat depressed*). It's the first time I've ever seen you like this—what's the matter?

DR. POTEKHIN. I'm sick and tired of everything. I don't want any lies —any soothing syrups—or rosy pictures! Nor do I want what you, Constantin, are proclaiming with such cheerful unconcern. I don't believe in this tale of yours about a mother—

SASHA (*in a frightened tone*). Good heavens! How can he say that!

VASSYA (*to* DR. POTEKHIN, *ironically*). Are you expressing your own opinion this time?

DR. POTEKHIN (*somberly*). Yes, this is my own opinion, the opinion of Nikolay Potekhin. (*He glances suddenly at* ELENA, *who is quietly embroidering, bent over her work. Something in her appearance hits him with the force of a blow on the head. He hunches his shoulders and starts off, speaking as he does so.*) If it sounded rude—I'm sorry—it was not intentional. (*He goes off.*)

VASSYA (*laughingly*). Alas! The colossus with feet of clay is crumbling— Oh, my native land!

ELENA (*glancing at* VASSYA, *then at her husband*). Do you know whose opinion is most valuable here? Sasha's.

SASHA (*hiding herself from view*). Oh, please—

ELENA. She grew up among the kind of people described in this story.

VASSYA (*to* ZINA, *in a low tone*). A story drawn from the life of Hottentots can be appreciated only by a Hottentot.

ZINA (*wearily*). Oh, stop it!

VASSYA. Chateaubriand sent his manuscript of *Atala* to the Indians, and only when they told him that everything was correct did he decide to publish his book.

MASTAKOV (*genially and softly*). Am I lying? I? Never.

ELENA. Why bother with explanations?

MASTAKOV. It's simply that I'm painfully sorry for people who see no goodness or beauty in life—who have no faith in tomorrow— I'm not blind to the dirt, the vulgarity, the cruelty—I see the stupidity of people. But I don't need all that. Yes, it arouses my disgust—but I'm not a satirist. I see, though, something else besides—the faint growths of the new, the truly human, the beautiful— This is dear to me—close to my heart. Have I the right to show people what I love, what I believe in? Is it a lie?

VASSYA (*smiling, in a lecturing tone*). Well, of course, this is your customary idea—you often speak about it. But you forget that there's something irresistible—before which all our human efforts, good and evil, are insignificant—doomed to destruction—

MASTAKOV. Lord! I'm tired of hearing such words!

VASSYA (*ironically*). Tired? Is that all?

MASTAKOV. You know the custom of washing the dead man's body? Let's wash ourselves of smug vulgarity and laziness while we're alive. Let mankind appear clean and beautiful at its last hour of doom—let it suffer destruction with a manly simplicity—with a smile!

VASSYA. Oh, romanticism! What difference does it make to me how I die?

MASTAKOV (*sadly*). It doesn't? It's all the same to you?

ELENA (*calmly*). Isn't it better to die beautifully?

VASSYA. No, it isn't. I'm not a romantic.

ZINA (*almost with despair*). For heaven's sake stop this funereal argument. We've just heard such a warmly sincere story—really this makes you feel ashamed before the author.

VASSYA. There can be no shame before authors. A writer must have courage—especially when he preaches—gay stoicism. (*Laughs.*) Quite a *mot,* isn't it?

SAMOKVASSOV *comes on carrying a bunch of flowers. Noticing* VASSYA *he stops, frowning and tugging at his mustache.*

ELENA (*animatedly*). Ah, come in—come in!

SAMOKVASSOV. How d'you do? (*Tries to divide the flowers for the two ladies, and drops some on the ground.*) May I offer you—and you— (*He is embarrassed.*) I'm getting old and awkward—

MASTAKOV *rises, walks to one side of the stage, and gazing at the sky whistles softly.* VASSYA *also rises and starts off. Seeing this,* SAMOKVASSOV *feels still more embarrassed.*

ELENA. Put these in water, Sasha, will you?

ZINA (*going after* VASSYA—*to* SAMOKVASSOV). Thank you. They're beautiful. (*To* VASSYA.) Do you like irises?

VASSYA (*in a low tone*). I like the retired policeman. He's in love with you—do you understand?

ZINA. Vassily. Why do you say such things?

VASSYA. He's sure to propose to you—

ZINA. Stop it.

VASSYA. And when I'm dead—you'll marry him—

They go off. Meanwhile ELENA *has been talking to* SAMOKVASSOV, *her speech animated, a kindly smile on her face.*

SAMOKVASSOV. Yes—but you see—

ELENA (*in a louder voice*). You exaggerate! People are much more stupid and lacking in culture than they are spiteful—

SAMOKVASSOV. I've lived for forty years, after all, and it hurts you when people who've hardly lived at all treat you as—

MEDVEDEVA *comes on.*

MEDVEDEVA. Good evening! And where's my patient?

ELENA (*glancing around*). Somewhere about.

MEDVEDEVA (*sitting down*). It's time for him to get home. He's been forbidden to walk after sunset, but he does it deliberately.

SAMOKVASSOV (*with a grunt*). H'm— Why deliberately?

MEDVEDEVA. That's how he is. I see what he's up to very well— (*Shakes her finger.*) I'm a simple woman, but I see everything—

MASTAKOV (*coming up to her*). Still, you mustn't get angry. We all know you're the kindest of souls!

MEDVEDEVA. I can't help it. I'm a mother, and my daughter is ruining her life. You're a nice man, a good man, but a mother's feelings you neither know nor understand. You don't know my sufferings, my endless worries, you don't see my tears— I've lost a son. Now I'm losing a daughter— Doesn't that mean something to a mother?

SAMOKVASSOV *frowns and moves away.*

MASTAKOV. You're losing your daughter? But why?

MEDVEDEVA (*roughly*). Surely you've noticed how worn out, tired, and nervous she's become? Night after night she lies awake, crying. And all he does is talk of death—always about the same thing—that he, a young man, is dying, while she will live on—

MASTAKOV (*with surprise*). He does that? And I thought he was—different.

MEDVEDEVA. And what a change in her! She used to be calm, strong, and gay. Sometimes she'd laugh and sing all day long—

MASTAKOV. I had the impression that he had a highly developed sense of human dignity and wouldn't—

MEDVEDEVA. He wouldn't indeed! Such an egotist show consideration for others? Not him. Why, he's the most important person in the world. To listen to him you'd think that when he dies the whole world must die—even the sun must go out. He'd like that, he would. And, my God, he even has the nerve to kiss her every now and then! What if he infects her? Wouldn't that be an outrage? Does she deserve it?

SAMOKVASSOV (*growling*). This—I must say—this is something—I don't know what to call it—

MEDVEDEVA. Ah, my good sir, you men are all alike—

ELENA (*warningly*). Aren't you too harsh on them? (*She indicates* SAMOKVASSOV *with a glance.*)

MEDVEDEVA (*changing her tone*). Perhaps I am. I forgot myself—because I'm a mother. I get mad for my daughter's sake, not for my own. For myself I don't care. But it's my duty to protect my child—and it breaks my heart to see somebody poison her soul with mortal anguish— That's what.

SAMOKVASSOV (*to* MASTAKOV). There's a situation for you, eh? What's one to do, I'd like to know? (*Looking agitated, he walks to one side.*)

MASTAKOV (*to* SAMOKVASSOV, *in a low tone*). A dying man has no right to drag a live person into his grave.

SAMOKVASSOV. But as you see, he does. I hate this Vassya. He has irony aplenty, but he's a worthless wretch.

MEDVEDEVA. I'd like some water, I think—

SASHA (*from behind the trees*). I'll get it right away.

MEDVEDEVA. My heart's burning. O Lord! Our merciful Lord! Save the young! Have pity on them! Load them with joy from your bounties!

All fall silent, cast down. SASHA *brings water.* VUKOL *comes from the veranda, yawning.*

VUKOL (*as he approaches*). I slept for eleven hours at a stretch! Went to bed at eight, got up at seven. (*Glancing around.*) I thought you were having tea. (*To* MEDVEDEVA.) Why do you look so ferocious, my wise lady?

MEDVEDEVA (*rising*). Just so— Here I am—bothering strange people with complaints, grating upon their ears— Please forgive me—I'll go home now.

ELENA. Stay a while—

VUKOL. You seem to be in pretty low spirits.

MEDVEDEVA (*resignedly*). No, I'll go. Zina's alone there—

VUKOL. Where's Vassya?

Nobody answers him. SAMOKVASSOV *gives him an angry look.*

I don't understand a thing. Must have had too much sleep. (*To* SAMOKVASSOV.) I feel, Miron, you're longing for some cold beer.

SAMOKVASSOV. I? (*Resolutely.*) Yes, let's go. I do want some very much— And generally— (*Goes off with rapid strides.*)

VUKOL (*following him*). Stop! Where are you going?

ELENA (*to* MEDVEDEVA). Do stay with us a little longer—

MEDVEDEVA. He's wearing her away there— No, I'll go. Please forgive me— Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken as I did—

ELENA. It's not for us to censure you.

MEDVEDEVA. Oh, my dear, isn't it hard to be a woman? You don't know that yet—yours is a grown-up child— (*She nods at* MASTAKOV.) but wait till you have several, and they begin to grow up—

MEDVEDEVA *and* ELENA *go off.* MASTAKOV *whistles and glances at his watch. Presently* ELENA *returns.*

MASTAKOV. What a likable old woman she is, isn't she?

ELENA. She is. A Russian to the core.

MASTAKOV (*glances around, in a low tone*). Do you think, Lena, she's capable—out of love for her daughter—for young life—of committing a crime? That's possible, isn't it?

ELENA (*smiling*). I believe it's possible.

MASTAKOV (*with emotion*). Magnificent! Ah, how magnificent it is, Lena! There's nothing as interesting as possibilities, and they're limitless.

ELENA. I don't think that she would do it—please understand that. But there have been cases of mothers who committed crimes for the sake of their children's happiness, as you know yourself.

MASTAKOV (*musingly*). But I *would* like her to be capable—for example—of giving poison to that Vassya. She's such a nice woman. Oh, it's a wonderful theme. Only mothers can think of the future—because they give birth to it in their children— (*After a pause.*) Now, what is it? Oh, yes—I have to go.

ELENA *glances at his face and moves off toward the house.* MASTAKOV, *frowning, follows her with his eyes, then speaks in a low tone, somewhat reluctantly.*

Don't you want to ask me where I'm going?

ELENA (*without turning to look at him*). No. Why, should I? You'd have told me yourself if you'd thought it necessary.

MASTAKOV. I would? Wait a minute or two.

ELENA (*returning*). Well, just a minute or two.

MASTAKOV (*in a downcast tone*). You know, I'm going to tear up that story. It's bad.

ELENA (*with a suggestion of severity in her voice*). Why is it bad?

MASTAKOV. Oh, they'll say it's all a fancy, a fabrication, untrue to life. That's what they'll say. I'm sorry I read it to them. They're such a depressing lot. Nikolay seems to be charged with something—

ELENA (*comes close to him and speaks with restraint but with great*

force). What do you care for the opinions of these people? They're failures mauled but not finished off by fate. They're doomed to destruction by the poverty of their spirit, by their lack of faith. What do you care for them? Study them, if you must, but let them be the dark background against which the fire of your own spirit, the sparkle of your imagination, will glow all the brighter. You must realize that they'll never hear you—never understand you—just as the dead never hear the living. And don't wait for their praises. They'll praise only those who'll waste their hearts on pitying them—to love them is an impossibility!

MASTAKOV (*embracing her and looking in her eyes*). When you speak like this, Lena, you're kind and affectionate—and you even frighten one a little— Where do you get this—this force, Lena?

ELENA. From that faith in the future which you've inspired in me.

MASTAKOV (*happily*). I have? Is it true? Then I can communicate my faith to others?

ELENA. Oh, yes.

MASTAKOV. This makes me—very glad! (*Glances around and speaks in a low tone.*) You know, sometimes I feel that the whole of Russia is a country of people who've been mauled but not finished off. Yes, the whole of Russia.

ELENA (*with anxiety, reproachfully*). What are you saying? Shame on you! That isn't what you really think.

MASTAKOV (*looking in her eyes again*). Y-yes—you do have faith! Unwavering faith! I can be like that too—but not always. At times I'm a prisoner of these dismal impressions—and until I overcome them I lose my individual self—I no longer see where I am—what differentiates me from those people. (*He puts his arm around her shoulder and walks with her slowly.*) They enter my soul like an empty room, litter it up with faded words and paltry thoughts heavy as stones. I begin to feel an autumn in my breast—and then I don't care for anything or anybody. Of course, there's beauty and color in autumn—

ELENA. But it's not your kind of beauty.

MASTAKOV (*glancing around*). No, it's not mine, Lena— You know, we made a mistake in coming here. It's cheap but bad. We live as if we were in the street. None of our friends comes to visit us. For more than two weeks I haven't talked to a single writer—

DR. POTEKHIN *appears among the trees.*

You're the only one with me—you, my clever girl—

SASHA *comes out of the house.*

ELENA (*hesitantly*). Let's go away, if you wish?

MASTAKOV. Where to? And where's the money?

SASHA (*to* MASTAKOV). Here's a note for you.

MASTAKOV (*slightly embarrassed, in a grumbling tone*). Oh, you vicious sprite!

SASHA (*in a low voice, as she goes off*). I'm not vicious.

MASTAKOV (*he turns the letter over in his hands.* ELENA *looks away from him. He speaks sadly*). Yes—Lena—there it is—

ELENA (*hurriedly, as if not wishing to listen to her husband*). Is that you, Doctor? DR. POTEKHIN *comes on.*

DR. POTEKHIN. Yes, it's me. Am I intruding?

ELENA. Of course not.

MASTAKOV. Not in the least, my friend.

He tries to push the letter he is holding into his pocket, but without realizing it drops it on the ground. The DOCTOR *notices this and steps forward, making* MASTAKOV *move away from him.*

DR. POTEKHIN. I'm very depressed.

MASTAKOV. To judge by your expression, you don't exaggerate.

DR. POTEKHIN. I was talking here this evening— All that could have been said in a different tone, of course. I hope I didn't give you the impression that I have any ill feeling against you personally. I'd hate to think that I did.

ELENA (*laughingly*). Oh, Doctor! You do imagine things!

MASTAKOV. Order, please! Don't interrupt the speaker!

DR. POTEKHIN. Well. So it is. I've really said all I had to say. Please don't think—

MASTAKOV. No, I can't do that. I always think. It's a professional habit, my friend.

DR. POTEKHIN (*sullenly*). I'm very glad you're joking.

MASTAKOV (*stepping back and bowing*). My lord, I observe your joy, and that makes me happy!

DR. POTEKHIN (*stepping on the letter and smiling*). You're a queer fish!

MASTAKOV. There you have something. (*He pauses, absorbed in thought and wiping his face with a handkerchief.*) Well, Lena—I'm going. Will you come with me?

ELENA (*firmly*). No.

MASTAKOV. Why not?

ELENA. I have to call on the Medvedevas.

MASTAKOV (*dropping his eyes*). I may call on Olga Vladimirovna. Would you care to join me?

ELENA. No.

MASTAKOV (*with a cough*). Well, as you please.

He goes off with unhurried steps, as if waiting to be stopped. ELENA *follows him with her eyes. The* DOCTOR *picks up the letter and as he looks at it, a broad smile spreads over his face.*

ELENA (*glancing at the* DOCTOR). What makes you look so pleased?

DR. POTEKHIN (*waving his hand*). Just this— (*Breaks off, afraid to say it.*) I expect father, Medvedeva, and Semyakovsky for a game of cards.

ELENA. I see. (*She starts off.*)

DR. POTEKHIN. Tell me—

ELENA. What?

DR. POTEKHIN. Have you often met people who don't lie?

ELENA. No, not often. (*Looks closely at his hand.*)

DR. POTEKHIN. Do you think—Constantin—

ELENA (*dryly*). Excuse me, what's that letter in your hand?

DR. POTEKHIN (*holding forth the letter*). I picked it up here—it's addressed to him—

ELENA (*taking it*). Is it? Did you pick it up in his presence?

DR. POTEKHIN (*embarrassed*). Yes—that is—no—he had already left—

ELENA. The hand seems to be Olga Vladimirovna's. (*Calls.*) Sasha! (*To the* DOCTOR.) It can hardly be anything important—

DR. POTEKHIN (*sullenly*). I don't know. How can I tell? You read it.

SASHA *is coming on.*

ELENA (*caressingly*). Sasha darling, run after my husband and give him this—he lost it before he had a chance to read it—

SASHA *runs off.* ELENA *goes into the house without looking at the* DOCTOR.

DR. POTEKHIN (*shakes his finger at her and whispers*). Fool! Just wait. Playing a noble comedy, eh? Wait, you'll cry yet!

VUKOL *and* SAMOKVASSOV *come on, both tipsy.*

VUKOL. If you want to catch a good quail—

SAMOKVASSOV (*jovially*). You keep away from good ale—and you didn't.

VUKOL. No, you listen to me—what you need is a first-class bitch—and yours is a voiceless wretch— This is a contradiction—

SAMOKVASSOV. With you everything contradicts everything else.

VUKOL. That's where the fun is— That's what's so interesting. Just think of it—people have toiled and moiled to hide all the sharp corners, to cover up all the rough spots—when suddenly Vukol Potekhin is born, looks around, and tells them—

SAMOKVASSOV. Tosh!

VUKOL. No. He looks around, uncovers and lays bare everything, and says— This is a deception—a deception that degrades us as human beings!

DR. POTEKHIN (*sharply*). I'm not going to play cards.

SAMOKVASSOV. Why?

DR. POTEKHIN. I have a headache.

He goes into the house. VUKOL *and* SAMOKVASSOV *exchange silent glances.*

SAMOKVASSOV (*feeling offended*). Say what you will, that's very tactless. It was his own suggestion, wasn't it? Now in another minute Medvedeva too will be here. You go tell him this is an improper thing to do.

VUKOL (*moving off reluctantly*). He's obstinate.

SAMOKVASSOV. He's altogether—a bad partner.

VUKOL (*grumblingly, on his way into the house*). A headache—at the age of thirty—

SAMOKVASSOV (*removes his peaked cap, puffs, and wipes his face with a handkerchief.* SASHA *comes on*). Where are you off to, my little bird?

SASHA. To the Medvedevas'.

SAMOKVASSOV. Tell the old lady that the card game is off. Oh, here they are! (*He touches himself up, and with a sprightly step walks toward* MEDVEDEVA *and* ZINA *who are approaching.*) You know, Matryona Ivanovna—

MEDVEDEVA (*she listens to something* SASHA *whispers to her*). I'll be right with you—wait.

SAMOKVASSOV (*to* ZINA). Why such a worried look? Has anything happened?

ZINA (*dully*). You have such a funny face.

SAMOKVASSOV. Funny? I think—all men over forty have funny faces. Yes!

ZINA. Have they? I didn't know that— You mustn't take offense.

SAMOKVASSOV. Honestly—how you talk to me—

ZINA. How do I talk to you?

SAMOKVASSOV. From above—as if from a great height— And I—when your mother was telling us how you're being tortured by this Vassya Turitsin—

ZINA (*astounded*). What's that? My mother—was telling you?

SAMOKVASSOV (*frightened and hurt, continues recklessly*). How he poisons you, such a beautiful being, with mental anguish—

ZINA (*indignantly*). How—dare you—who gave you the right? You're nothing but a savage—or you're crazy! (*She looks at him intently and speaks more softly.*) What's wrong with you? Why did you say that?

SAMOKVASSOV (*stepping back awkwardly and swallowing his words*). Please forgive me— Of course I have no right— I'm an uncivilized man—and so forth—

ZINA (*in a low tone*). No, not because of that, but because—it's cruel—and horrid to speak like that about a sick man—

SAMOKVASSOV. It was your mother who spoke like that—allow me to explain— I'm not a wicked, horrid man—I'm just an unhappy, ordinary Russian. I don't know how to measure good and evil—I know nothing—I've squandered the best that was in me—and now I'm worthless— It's been an idiotic life. Believe me, I'm utterly ashamed of myself. And then I get to know you and your friends—people leading clean, serious lives—taking a kind, unselfish interest in others. It strikes me as something new, truly human—it has a refreshing effect on my soul. And now suddenly I see you sacrificing yourself to—

ZINA (*sternly*). I forbid you to speak of that!

SAMOKVASSOV. Please listen to me, in the name of God! I've seen too many useless sacrifices—

ZINA (*in a softer tone*). Do understand me—I can't, I won't listen, if you— What do you want to say?

SAMOKVASSOV. Let's go away from here—give me a few minutes of your kindness.

ZINA *nods agreement. She has become much interested and listens with keen attention as they walk off.*

I'm twice as old as you are. I know life, and I want to tell you—value yourself more! We have but few honest, healthy people—people of good blood—

VUKOL (*coming out onto the veranda*). Miron! Policeman!

SAMOKVASSOV (*going off*). I'll be back! Hang on!

VUKOL (*grumbling*). Well—now this one has run away. The devil take you all!

OLGA *comes on right. She is agitated but tries to hide it.*

OLGA. Who are you roaring at?

VUKOL (*playfully*). Oh, my beautiful neighbor—I haven't seen you for well nigh sixty years, and—

OLGA. And what? Your attempted compliment hasn't come off.

VUKOL. You didn't let me finish. I roar because I'm weighed down with the anxiety of a cabinet minister—I can't make up a party.

OLGA. A card party? Your wit is wonderful—so original and subtle— Are your people in?

VUKOL. Which of them? My son?

OLGA. And others.

VUKOL. I don't know. My son is in. He has a headache—the young generation of today! All the rest are scattered.

OLGA. And the writer too?

VUKOL. That one is always scattered.

OLGA. Bravo! You're growing up. I have to admit—getting wittier and wittier. (*She notices* MASTAKOV *among the trees, left.* VUKOL *does not see him.*) Will you ask the Doctor—to give me—the book he borrowed from me— Please.

VUKOL (*going into the house*). Anything to oblige you—any time.

OLGA *beckons to* MASTAKOV *to come over.* ELENA *and* MEDVEDEVA *emerge onto the veranda, but they do not see* OLGA *who is screened from them by the corner of the house and the trees.*

MEDVEDEVA. When I think of the things that bother us women, my heart sinks!

ELENA (*catches sight of her husband and cannot conceal her joy*). You have—come back?

MASTAKOV *comes forward and slowly walks past the house.*

MASTAKOV. Yes—that is, not quite yet. I'll stroll for a while.

ELENA. Would you like some tea?

MASTAKOV. No.

OLGA (*in a whisper*). Why so long? And looking so dull?

MASTAKOV (*uneasily*). Come on.

OLGA. What's happened to you?

MASTAKOV. It's hard for me to say—I'm a little tired.

OLGA. Yes? Only that?

They stroll off right. DR. POTEKHIN *comes out onto the veranda, sees* ELENA *and* MEDVEDEVA *and, in the distance,* OLGA *and* MASTAKOV.

DR. POTEKHIN (*in a loud, solemn voice*). What book are you asking for, Olga Vladimirovna? I haven't borrowed any books from you. Perhaps you did, Constantin? (*With a glance at* ELENA, *his shoulders hunched, retires into the house.*)

ELENA (*nervously straightening her kerchief around her shoulders*). What an unpleasant voice the Doctor has!

MEDVEDEVA. I dislike these theological students. They're rude and think too highly of themselves.

ELENA (*with exaggerated interest*). Was he at a theological seminary?

MEDVEDEVA. Of course. He was brought up by his uncle, a priest. His father, you know, was exiled to a faraway place, somewhere in Siberia—

ELENA (*pricking up her ears*). Is that so? (*Pauses for a few moments.*) Do you hear anything?

MEDVEDEVA. What?

ELENA (*standing close to her*). Laughter. Somebody's laughing—

MEDVEDEVA (*after a pause*). No, I don't think I hear anything. And who would want to laugh around here? Only Olga Vladimirovna—she can laugh—

ELENA. Yes?

MEDVEDEVA. She's a pleasant woman, I must say—perhaps spiteful, but pleasant all the same—

ELENA. Pleasant? In what way?

MEDVEDEVA. Well, she's gay and lighthearted—when she visits us even our Vassya smiles and shows his green teeth. He did try to get her down in the dumps once or twice— Do you know, he says, that all of us humans are doomed to die? And she answers him, Nothing, nothing will make me die before my time—

ELENA. She's not a very serious person, is she?

MEDVEDEVA. There is something of that in her. But then, not every woman cares for hard, serious thinking. Otherwise she's all right, has her wits about her—gets what she wants— And she knows her men!

ZINA *comes on left, looking tired. Throwing herself in the armchair, she gazes at her mother and* ELENA *with a twisted smile.*

MEDVEDEVA *turns to her with alarm.*

What is it? What's wrong with you, for heaven's sake?

ZINA. I'm tired—

MEDVEDEVA. Oh, he'll kill you!

ZINA. It isn't he, Mother! And—you have no occasion to shout about him in the presence of strangers. Lena, congratulate me—I've conquered Samokvassov's heart.

ELENA (*sincerely*). Oh, the poor fellow!

MEDVEDEVA. Well, even he, I'll say, is better—at least he's not sick.

ZINA. And he has money too, Mother! Think it over! I don't know, Lena, who's more unhappy—he or I. How wonderfully he spoke. He went down on his knees—offering money to send Vassya to the south —with a doctor and a nurse—and he cried like a child—

MEDVEDEVA (*in a grumbling tone*). They're all little boys when they're in love. I know it! And what did you say to him?

ZINA (*tossing about*). Mother! How can you ask? (*Heavy silence.*)

ELENA (*thoughtfully*). He's a very unhappy man. He once told me his life story—it was frightening to hear it. He's kind—but he did terrible things—as if he lived in a dream. Sometimes he woke up and hated himself—but he went on doing horrid things again. He speaks of women with such warmth and respect, but he lived with them like a brute . . . Oh, these strange, spineless, will-less people—will they ever disappear?

MEDVEDEVA. You see, Lena, you say just what I say. They strangle us!

ZINA (*wearily*). My dear ones—what am I to do? (*In a frightened tone, hardly above a whisper.*) The honest truth is—I don't love Vassya —I've grown sick of him.

MEDVEDEVA (*with relief*). Thank God, at last.

ZINA. Keep quiet, Mother! It's bad—you don't understand it!

ELENA (*dryly*). One can understand it.

ZINA. I feel sorry for him—so sorry it breaks my heart. But I—I can't—those cold, clammy hands—that odor—it's hard for me to listen to his voice—to his spiteful, lifeless words— Lena, it's horrible to have pity, but no love—it's dishonest—it's insulting. When he talks—it's like somebody else—not himself—talking—and what he says is malicious, vulgar libel. He hates everybody who's going to go on living. And ah, what things he says sometimes! My God! And he's the man I used to love— (*She cries.*) I can't do it any more! I shudder when he touches me with his hand—it revolts me!

MEDVEDEVA. My daughter—I also pity him—but you—you, after all, must continue to live!

ZINA. Oh, my God, my God! How good it was to love. How good it is when you love!

ELENA (*bending over her, repressing her own sobs*). Yes—when you love—when we love—we cease to be ourselves—we live in others—

CURTAIN

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ACT III

The same house moved closer downstage. A gray, overcast evening. VUKOL POTEKHIN *is seated in a high-backed wicker chair on the veranda reading a book, his feet resting on another chair. Through one of the gauze-covered windows* DR. POTEKHIN *can be seen pacing up and down the room and smoking.*

VUKOL (*raises his head, moves his lips, and yawns*). Nikolay!

DR. POTEKHIN. Yes?

VUKOL. What's fatalism?

DR. POTEHKIN (*dully*). Fatalism—well, *fatum*—fate—destiny—

VUKOL. Don't tell me the words. I know all that myself. Get down to the idea!

DR. POTEKHIN. Leave me alone, please. This crazy talk! It's too boring!

VUKOL. This isn't craziness, my friend, it's old age. (*After a pause.*) Do you like Savonarola?

DR. POTEKHIN. Who?

VUKOL. Savonarola.

DR. POTEKHIN. No. I don't like him.

VUKOL (*thoughtfully*). Why don't you?

DR. POTEKHIN. Damned if I know!

VUKOL (*with an air of satisfaction*). Well, I don't like him either. I haven't read much about him though. Have you?

DR. POTEKHIN. Not a thing.

VUKOL. H'm— You're not much of a reader, I must say. That's not to your credit. (*Turning the book over in his hands.*) Strange things books are—disturbing things. Here's Schiller. I was fond of him when I was young. Now I've picked him up—and remembered your mother. We read his "Song of a Bell" together—that was before we got married. We were both Reds—speculated about the fate of mankind—and shouted. Some five years ago you also shouted at everybody—including me. (*With a satisfied air.*) Today you keep silent—you've played yourself—shouted yourself—out, my friend! Why so quickly?

DR. POTEKHIN *comes out with a hat in his hand.* Where are you off to?

DR. POTEKHIN. To see a patient—Vassya Turitsin.

VUKOL. I'll join you. It's too dull to be alone. My policeman seems to have faded out.

DR. POTEKHIN. He's coming now.

VUKOL. Ah! Then I'll stay—

The DOCTOR *looks at his father as if not certain whether to believe him, and returns to his room.*

I see! Of course—it's plain enough— (*To* SAMOKVASSOV, *as he comes on.*) Well, how's the police force? What plots are the Germans cooking up against us?

SAMOKVASSOV (*waving his hand*). Ah, let 'em!

VUKOL. You're through with Germany? Fast work. Whom are you going to denounce now? Up to 1905 you denounced the government —then gave it up. After that you denounced the revolutionists—and gave that up. Then you went after the Germans—and this is over too. Who's to be next? How are you going to get along now?

SAMOKVASSOV (*morosely*). I'll denounce myself.

VUKOL. A harmless occupation—and an easy one. Awfully simple too, and doesn't bind one to anything.

SAMOKVASSOV. I'm an ass, it seems—

VUKOL. Starting in right away? (*Professorially.*) You should know, though, that the ass is a much maligned animal—he's useful and not at all stupid—

SAMOKVASSOV (*peeping in through the window*). I could tell you a story—

VUKOL. Fire away—sit down.

SAMOKVASSOV (*in a low voice*). Let's go somewhere.

VUKOL. All right. I'll have my rheumatism for company, though. It does plague me! (*They start off.*)

SAMOKVASSOV. Shame does that to me—and weariness.

VUKOL (*limping slightly*). Weariness? That's been our fair companion throughout history—but shame, no—you've thought that up, my friend. Pure imagination! When, please, did we ever feel shame? "Shame is not smoke, it doesn't eat one's eyes out," the adage says—and everybody believes it.

ELENA *comes from indoors, a bright silk scarf over her head, a sunshade in her hand. She nods silently.*

Greetings! What's the matter with you? Aren't you well?

ELENA. Why, I'm quite well.

VUKOL. But your little face is pale, and your little eyes—

ELENA (*smiling, as she straightens herself*). You imagine it—

VUKOL. I'm glad I'm wrong. Pleasant mistakes are as rare as gay people—

SAMOKVASSOV. You do wag your tongue today.

VUKOL. Rheumatism drives you to philosophy—you just can't resist, my friend. A healthy man has no occasion for philosophizing—

They disappear from view. ELENA *slowly proceeds on her way.*

DR. POTEKHIN *comes out and hurries after her.*

DR. POTEKHIN. One moment, please!

ELENA *looks at him in silent inquiry.*

I must speak to you—I'll be brief—just two questions. Let's go to my room—please!

ELENA. Your room reeks of cigar smoke.

DR. POTEKHIN. Cigar smoke? All right— Never mind—

ELENA. What are you so agitated about?

DR. POTEKHIN (*in a low voice*). I? Now look—you must be well aware—

ELENA (*dryly*). I am.

DR. POTEKHIN. That he's unfaithful to you—

ELENA. I said I know it!

DR. POTEKHIN. And you're so calm? What are you going to do? Don't you feel insulted—you who are so proud? (*He gasps.*)

ELENA (*with a short laugh*). What a lot of questions! I don't care to know why you ask them—but I'll answer you—perhaps that will calm you. And I'll answer you too because at one time you had a friendly feeling for my husband.

DR. POTEKHIN. I still have.

ELENA. We won't go into that— You know I love him.

DR. POTEKHIN. I don't understand it—I can't—

ELENA (*softly*). That's your misfortune. So I repeat, I love him—and please remember it.

DR. POTEKHIN (*rather coarsely*). And he tramples you in the mud—with the first pretty and accessible woman—

ELENA (*turning pale, sternly*). My husband cannot love a bad woman.

DR. POTEKHIN. Damn it, anyway! Are you mad?

ELENA. If you permit yourself to continue in this tone—

DR. POTEKHIN. No—I'm silent. But explain it to me. After all, I'm a human being—I love you—I have the right to ask that much—

ELENA. I've already told you—my husband's work is more important and more precious than my happiness as a woman—than my love—my life itself. Don't smile. Not so very long ago you had a high opinion of him yourself. That was—you'll excuse my candor—before you began to dote on me—when you were still a whole man—

DR. POTEKHIN. It was your stony heart that broke me—

ELENA. What grim talk! Now look—this is the last time I'll speak to you on this subject—and I'd like you to understand me. I'm losing Constantin—perhaps—but I know my own worth—I feel he needs me—simply as a human being! (*With warm conviction.*) I love the whole peculiar world of his thoughts and feelings—I love his live soul. When he speaks of contempt for suffering, of the strength of man and the beauty of life, I gaze at him with admiration and am ready to pray: O God, bless my husband's path of joy and victory! I know life better than you do, and I've seen more sorrow—but I've learned to despise sorrow—to understand its insignificance.

DR. POTEKHIN. Words—his words! I don't believe you—you're only echoing somebody else's words!

ELENA. He's not just somebody else to me. However, I know how

accustomed we get to sorrow—how we grow to love sorrow—yes, love it, because it makes us more important in our own eyes. (*With disquiet.*) And when I notice that sorrow is coming to him—that it's about to touch him—I feel frightened. He's so unstable—so fine—so easily broken—

DR. POTEKHIN (*flaring up*). This is all pure fancy! You've imagined the man and become his slave. You've created an idol, a master of your soul. You're just bored with him because he has less brains than you have—and for a diversion you're casting yourself in the role of a victim.

ELENA (*forbearingly*). I'll repeat your own words about him. Three years ago you said: When I see and hear him I grow younger—I have faith in everything, and life seems to me light and simple. Did you say this?

DR. POTEKHIN. I was mistaken—as you are now.

ELENA. And on one occasion you warned me. Dear friend, you said, try to restrain his freedom as little as possible—he'll remain a youth to his dying days. This was your advice—the advice of a friend and a man of honor. Where's that man now?

DR. POTEKHIN. You wounded him mortally and now you're finishing him off.

ELENA (*smiling*). Where do you get such words? (*Thoughtfully.*) We don't seem to understand each other. This minute, as I'm talking to you, I feel as if I were talking to all women—possibly, I want to justify myself in their eyes—say to them that I feel nothing humiliating in my conduct—although it's hard on a woman. Well—it *is* hard! And another thing I'd like to tell them is how necessary it is to love a good, honest man and protect him from all harm—

DR. POTEKHIN (*incensed*). A man who mocks at you!

ELENA. That he'll never do.

DR. POTEKHIN. He's done it.

ELENA. In itself, a physical infidelity is not a mockery. There may be a dozen reasons for it. And one can be untrue without losing his respect for the other party.

DR. POTEKHIN. This is impossible—you're not human! You're nothing but a brain—an abstract thought—without flesh, without a heart—

ELENA. You should also add there's no animal in me, the beautiful noble wild animal and so on and so forth, about which men wax so eloquent in order to intoxicate women with their words and so arouse more passion in them. (*Drawing herself up she speaks with great force, lowering her voice.*) It may surprise you, but I have all that in me—the wild animal and the passion—

DR. POTEKHIN. Don't tease me—you mustn't. What's the sense of torturing yourself?

ELENA. Haven't I made myself clear?

DR. POTEKHIN. Oh, words! Or is it all a pose, a part to play?

ELENA. You may think what you will. Perhaps I am posing—perhaps I am playing—for high stakes— (*As if intoxicated.*) If I lose, life will win through his joy.

DR. POTEKHIN. Curse him—and all that idiotic life!

ELENA. You grate on my ears with your strange tirades and curses. Where do you get them? Let's finish this talk—I have to go—

DR. POTEKHIN. It's horrifying—what you've said. There's no woman in it.

ELENA. There you are! So let's end it, please. Everything has been said. You won't talk to me again about my husband and your love—will you? (*Smiling.*) Besides, what good am I for a romantic affair, I who am so cerebral?

DR. POTEKHIN. But what if—I want to understand you—what if your child hadn't died?

ELENA. I still wouldn't interfere with him. If I had to leave him, he'd certainly let me keep the child—it would only be in his way.

DR. POTEKHIN. No. I don't believe you! You've tried to hide your humiliation—your despair—and you've hidden nothing. I see it's hard on you!

ELENA. Did I say it's easy?

TAISYA, *the housemaid of the* MEDVEDEVAS, *comes on, running, calling as she draws near.*

TAISYA. Doctor—quick, please!

DR. POTEKHIN (*giving a chair a push*). Oh, hell! What is it?

TAISYA. He's suddenly turned bad—blood gushing from his mouth—

ELENA (*in a tired voice*). You'd better go.

DR. POTEKHIN *walks off in silence.*

TAISYA (*following the* DOCTOR). You've forgotten your hat—

ELENA *sinks into a chair, left, behind another chair.* SASHA *comes out on the veranda carrying newspapers and letters. Noticing* ELENA, *she stops, brought up short.*

SASHA. You didn't go? Aren't you feeling well?

ELENA. Is that the mail? Anything for me?

SASHA. No. Only for the Doctor. (*Puts the mail on the window sill.*) Perhaps you'd like to go to your room?

ELENA. No. I'm all right here.

SASHA. Elena Nikolayevna—I'm scared! What's going to happen to you?

ELENA. Don't worry, Sasha, it's all right— I feel tired—haven't enough strength— Help me, O Lord! I haven't the strength—

SASHA (*listening*). Oh! She's coming here!

ELENA (*half rising and dropping into the chair again, as if in a faint*). Leave me, Sasha—please—I'll go in later—

SASHA *goes in.* OLGA'S *voice can be heard, the tone one of quiet injury. Presently* OLGA *and* MASTAKOV *come on, right.*

OLGA. And this I hear from a man—a man who says he's in love with me! Shame on you!

MASTAKOV. But how can I do that—so suddenly!

OLGA. What's there to wait for? Let everybody know you love me. Haven't I the right to be proud of it?

MASTAKOV. What's that got to do with it? It's all so strange. (*He is confused, and his nervous gesticulations, mussed-up appearance, and awkwardness make him look slightly comical.*)

OLGA (*excited, her voice tinged with annoyance and alarm*). I dislike mystery!

MASTAKOV. Let me think it over.

OLGA. Think what over?

MASTAKOV. I really don't know—can't see—how I'm going to tell her that.

OLGA (*indignantly*). Now look—what is all this? Haven't you been telling me you love me? Or have you been joking?

MASTAKOV (*cheerlessly*). Joking indeed. But I never imagined it was all so complicated— However, I'll go in and tell her—just in a few words—and after that we'll see— You'd better leave, if you don't mind. I'll be back shortly.

OLGA. All right. I'll be in the woods.

Straightening his hat with a resolute movement of his hand, MASTAKOV *walks toward the veranda.* ELENA *rises to face him. She is calm.*

MASTAKOV (*stops and removes his hat, waving it in his hand and averting his eyes from her as he speaks*). Well, Lena—I've come to tell you—though I haven't prepared myself for this—and altogether—Now please don't be cross with me—just try to understand—

ELENA (*moving to the veranda steps, calls to* OLGA). Don't go—

OLGA *stops.*

MASTAKOV (*alarmed*). She's not to blame—I swear to you!

ELENA (*restrainedly*). Be quiet—and please leave us. Ask Olga Vladimirovna to tell me all she considers necessary, and go away—

OLGA *slowly advances to the veranda. She is embarrassed, but puts on a brave front. She gazes at* ELENA *with eyes at once surprised and suspicious.*

OLGA. What is there to tell? You seem to understand the situation—so everything is clear.

MASTAKOV. You see, Lena—it happened unexpectedly— (*He clasps his hands in an imploring gesture.*) Please don't say harsh things to each other—and please let's have no dramatics. You're both so—

Leaving his sentence unfinished, he waves his hand and walks into the house. ELENA *is standing on the upper step of the veranda,* OLGA *on the ground holding onto the railing. There is a pause.*

OLGA (*smiling*). Well—you have nothing to say? May I go?

ELENA (*softly*). There's no need for triumphant smiles. We're both

women—remember that. Today I stand before you exposed to laughter. Are you sure that tomorrow, or a week later—

OLGA. Don't try to frighten me—it's a waste of time. Naturally, you're angry with me—despise me.

ELENA. I? No. Why should I?

OLGA. Oh, I realize you know this is not my first love affair—

ELENA (*surprised, failing to see the point*). Why bring that into it?

OLGA (*with growing animation*). You must know that I've been regarded more harshly—with a greater show of triumphant superiority —than I've regarded you. I'm having my little revenge now. I'll be frank—I enjoy seeing a lower value set on you who are so clever than on me. (*She pauses for a moment, a strange smile on her lips.*) Well, that's how life is. Don't imagine that I feel guilty— Really, I don't quite know why I'm saying all this. You seem to have provoked me a little—

ELENA (*quickly*). I didn't mean to. How have I?

OLGA (*as if probing her*). Oh, nothing really bad. You said we're both women. It came very pat from you—I almost said it was very clever of you. I think I may go now?

ELENA (*stepping down*). Now that you've been talking like this—

OLGA (*suspiciously*). Like what?

ELENA. I mean—so simply.

OLGA. Oh! Why try to be subtle? Everything's plain.

ELENA. You think so?

OLGA. Of course.

ELENA (*firmly*). You believe Constantin's interest in you is something serious and deep, don't you?

OLGA (*ironically*). What a question! And why do you want to know what I think?

ELENA (*amiably, in a low voice*). You must agree, his life is not a matter of indifference to me.

OLGA (*slightly put out*). Oh, I see—his life! So you're interested in his attitude? But you should ask him about that—he's bound to know how serious he is.

ELENA. He doesn't know.

OLGA (*glancing mistrustfully at her*). You'll excuse me if I don't believe you—and if I ask what you want from me?

ELENA. Imagine for a moment that it's his mother or older sister talking to you—

OLGA (*with a smile*). To imagine you as his older sister—yes, that wouldn't be so difficult. But you have been his wife—and I can't believe one who feels she's been injured.

ELENA (*dryly*). I speak in your own interest.

OLGA. My sincere thanks. Don't you think this is comic?

ELENA. No, I don't. I wanted to warn you—he doesn't know himself very well, he lives as though it were all play—

OLGA (*hiding her alarm*). I like that kind of life myself—

ELENA. He hates everything that's unpleasant, depressing—when it comes close to him he's at a loss what to do—

OLGA. What am I to conclude from this?

ELENA. Think it over.

OLGA (*laughing nervously*). I'd probably say something very rude to any other woman— (*With intent to hurt.*) But I feel sorry for you. (*Waits for a reply.*) You want to frighten me— I'm surprised you don't talk about his talent—his duty to society, his service to art, and so forth—

ELENA (*calmly*). I didn't think it was necessary to talk about that. If you're taking a place by his side, you're obviously confident that you'll be able to sustain the bright spirit within him which has captivated you. You must also be convinced, of course, that your companionship will be better for him in every respect than mine—

OLGA (*in an agitated tone*). I haven't the slightest desire to play school principal to him—I'm not a blue stocking! You picture him as if he were a child. O, la, la! I know these children! (*Getting flustered.*) Now you look at me as if I've picked your pocket. You think I'm vulgar, of course— (*Pauses for an answer.*) You've done something wrong to me— You've involved me in thoughts that are foreign to me— What is it you want? Am I to blame for what's happened?

MASTAKOV *appears at the door.*

I'd never met any man like him—never imagined there could be a man who was so necessary to me—

ELENA. And you—to him?

OLGA (*almost shouting*). That's none of your business! How dare you question me?

ELENA (*flaring up, coldly*). I have no further need to do that—

OLGA *looks at her furiously, is about to say something.*

You're not feeling well?

OLGA *covers her face with her hands and hurries off.* ELENA, *her countenance stern, follows* OLGA *with her eyes. As she turns around she notices her husband, who is watching her with an expression of surprise and fear on his pale face. She speaks firmly, almost coarsely:*

Had she been a worse woman or a better one, she would have been stronger than I—

MASTAKOV. By God, Elena—by God, you're extraordinary! What sort of person are you?

ELENA (*walking past him*). A woman who loves.

She goes in. He follows her with his eyes, rubs his forehead, quickly descends the veranda steps, then turns and runs up again.

MASTAKOV (*mumbling to himself*). No—first I must—Elena! (ELENA *comes out.*) Wait. Where are you going?

ELENA. To the Medvedevas'.

MASTAKOV. Listen—I give you my word of honor—

ELENA (*with sudden spirit*). Leave me alone, you adolescent fool!

MASTAKOV (*clasping his head*). There it is! A tragedy! Now, please calm yourself a little—

ELENA (*with anguish*). It's monstrous! It's common! You who are so straight and clean—allowed yourself to become infatuated—with whom? She'll poison your mind, destroy you—

MASTAKOV (*in despair*). Oh, the devil! How could I know it would turn out so serious?

ELENA. For men like you, women are the steps by which you climb higher and higher. But she's lower than I am—understand that. Nor is she necessary to you—it's you who are necessary to her. And I won't permit that. Nobody can use you for personal amusement—never!

MASTAKOV. Oh, you just think with your head—but what the devil—

ELENA. Yes, I do think with my head—for both of us—for myself so as not to be a hindrance to you, and for you because you live without thinking—

MASTAKOV. Weighing and measuring everything, always—it's intolerable!

ELENA. How else when you don't weigh or measure yourself? You can't do without it among living beings who feel pain and cause it to one another. I have to think and weigh to protect you against unnecessary intrusions—against anything that may disrupt your inner world, destroy its peculiar quality. Do you think it's easy for me to do? What is it that dries up my soul, that kills my laughter and joy? And here I suddenly see something that may kill you! I might have understood it if you had fallen in love with Sasha—she's such a pure, such a refreshing personality—

MASTAKOV (*in a low tone*). Sasha—what a fantastic idea! A human being needs freedom, Elena, and I'm a human being—

ELENA. Assume for a moment that I too am a human being—

MASTAKOV. You're sometimes like an old monk and I your novice —though I may be wrong—I don't know much about monks. I must say the whole thing is much more complicated than I thought, and anything but jolly. I dislike dramatics, and here you and she are both displeased—

ELENA (*unable to suppress a smile*). You're such a funny boy! Just think what you're saying. How can one play with other people?

MASTAKOV. Now really, Elena, there's no room in my heart for all those serious thoughts—and long soliloquies— (*With growing fervor.*) I'm terribly glad to be living—glad that around me, humming and throbbing, is Russia, such a dear, lovable country— Those droll Russian faces, so intimately appealing, so human, keep flashing before your eyes— Children grow up with that something about them that is so excitingly different—have you noticed? And those Russian mothers—and the queer old fogies, so touching in their uselessness,

who fill your heart with fine, inoffensive pity for them. It's a joy to be living, Lena, honestly! Old fires are going out, but new ones are flaring up— You get an urge to write verse, poems—to speak sunny, intimate words—and wink at people: "It's all right, brothers! We're alive and kicking!" And when you think and talk about this, you come to feel, imperceptibly, so close to the person sitting beside you—your heart mellows so toward that person that it doesn't make a bit of difference who it is, what clothes the person wears—a man's or a woman's— VUKOL *approaches, limping.*

VUKOL. Constantin! Elena Nikolayevna!

ELENA (*starting*). Just a moment— How is he? Very bad?

VUKOL. Go on over— They've all lost their heads—do nothing but cry—

MASTAKOV. There you are, Lena— (*She hurries off.*) Do I have to go too?

ELENA (*calling back*). No, don't!

VUKOL. Fiddlesticks! Of course you go—

MASTAKOV. What's the point?

VUKOL. H'm—somebody you know is dying—it's a matter of courtesy, if you like— Besides, you're a writer—you have to see everything —it's your duty.

MASTAKOV (*with a sigh*). All right—let's go.

VUKOL (*as they walk off*). Well, one more man off the list. Men go, but contradictions remain. Make an allegory out of that!

MASTAKOV (*grumblingly*). That's all I need! I hate allegories—

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Night. The front garden of the MEDVEDEVAS' *summer house. Acacia trees and lilacs cover most of the small two-windowed house with its little glass-enclosed porch. The window on the right side of the porch is screened with a bedsheet or tablecloth. A beam of light falls on the steps through the open door from a lamp burning in the entrance hall.*

On the steps are SAMOKVASSOV *and* ZINA, *while in front of them the* DOCTOR *walks to and fro, smoking. From the house come the sound of furniture being moved, and the clatter of dishes.*

ZINA (*quietly*). This morning he said he felt better—

DR. POTEKHIN (*glumly*). All chemists say that before the end.

SAMOKVASSOV (*persuasively*). I have a sister—a wonderful woman—she threw away her life on her husband. True, his disease was something else, but it makes no difference. She nursed him for nine whole years—just think of it—giving a woman's best years, all her strength, to the caprices of a sick man! It's terrible! At thirty, her hair almost

white, she was left a widow, with a five-year-old child on her hands—a weak, exasperatingly nervous boy—

DR. POTEKHIN (*coming closer*). You too condemn the weak?

SAMOKVASSOV. Not at all—

DR. POTEKHIN. You should be the last person to do it—

SAMOKVASSOV (*hurt*). What do you mean?

The DOCTOR *moves off.* VUKOL *comes out, remaining on the porch.*

I never said anything like that.

DR. POTEKHIN (*from a distance*). You're too late with these theories—they're out of style now.

SAMOKVASSOV (*to* ZINA). What's wrong with him? Why is he so sour?

ZINA (*rising and going inside*). I don't know. He must be tired.

VUKOL (*coming down onto the steps*). Has my offspring been ill-treating you? (*Sits down beside* SAMOKVASSOV, *sighing.*) My foot's bothering me— Well, Miron, fate has cleared the way for you—

SAMOKVASSOV (*in a pained tone*). Stop it—how can you?

VUKOL (*in a low voice*). You think she's not pleased deep down in her heart? Ha! I know women, my friend—

SAMOKVASSOV. No, Vukol. Neither you nor I know anything about it. (*After a pause.*) To take myself as an example, I never had any desire—persistent, passionate desire—to know things. Yet it's necessary, it turns out—

VUKOL. H'm—what do you mean by that?

SAMOKVASSOV. I mean this. Here I am, I, a man of forty-two, and I don't understand a man younger than myself—I don't understand his way of thinking and living—even his speech. This in my forties! It's a fine country where everybody's a stranger to everybody else. Now, imagine a European—

VUKOL (*half yawning*). Nonsense! You know nothing about Europeans. Did you ever throw any of them in the clink? No. So don't talk about Europeans when the subject under discussion is women—

DR. POTEKHIN (*coming up*). Have you a match, father?

VUKOL (*handing him a box of matches*). Give it back. You borrow a box of matches and disappear, and I with my sore foot have to hobble around looking for matches.

DR. POTEKHIN. If you're bothered with rheumatism, you should go to bed. Besides, at your age you can catch a cold in the night air. (*Goes off, forgetting to return the matches.*)

VUKOL (*nudging* SAMOKVASSOV). You see? You'd better get married quick. At seventy you'll have a doctor son, a man of culture— It'll be very convenient. He'll take away your matches, and you'll have to—y-yes— (*After a pause.*) Incidentally, what a strange way of talking we have. We say: catch a cold. As if we're chasing after it. If anything, it's the other way around. Or we say—he went through the university—

(*Nodding in the direction of his son.*) He did, went right through it—but it didn't have any effect on him—

SAMOKVASSOV (*unwillingly*). You are—

VUKOL. A chatterbox?

SAMOKVASSOV. No—what d'you call it—a misanthrope.

VUKOL (*with some pride*). I'm no misanthrope, my friend—I'm a skeptic. We have too few skeptics—which indicates that we're not any too clever—

SAMOKVASSOV (*with a chuckle*). You talk, but I can't understand why—

ELENA *and* ZINA *come out of the house.* SAMOKVASSOV *rises, letting them pass.*

ELENA. Will you help Constantin move the trunks, please?

SAMOKVASSOV. Certainly. You stay where you are, skeptic. (*Goes in.*)

VUKOL (*following him*). It's damp here. My offspring is right.

ELENA (*affectionately*). Go and lie down—you may be able to sleep.

ZINA. No, I don't want to—I'm afraid I may sleep.

ELENA. Afraid?

ZINA. I feel ashamed. I have no feeling of grief, of loss—I'm so strangely, so shamefully calm. The noose has come undone—now I don't have to lie, to twist my own feelings—I don't have to appear tender and loving— That's a relief, but it's wrong too.

ELENA (*smiling*). I wish Constantin could hear you—

ZINA. No, don't tell him. I don't want him to think that I'm callous —I have such respect for him.

DR. POTEKHIN (*coming up*). You have to have a death certificate. I'll make it out for you. (*Goes into the house.*)

ZINA. How he said it! Every time he comes near I feel weight bearing down on me—Lena, do I seem heartless to you?

ELENA. Stop talking about it. You're only twenty.

MASTAKOV *appears at the door.*

MASTAKOV. Come here, Elena. (*After she comes over, he whispers irritably to her.*) Look, why the devil is Nikolay snarling at me? He hangs about and pops his eyes at me. What does he want?

ELENA (*going in*). I'll be right back with you, Zina.

MASTAKOV (*following her*). It's outrageous!

ZINA *stretches herself tiredly, pulls an overhanging twig to her face and smells it. A glance at the screened window makes her start, and with a frightened air she rubs the dust off her hands.* SAMOKVASSOV *comes out with a shawl.*

SAMOKVASSOV. Take this—it's damp.

ZINA. Thank you. You're so considerate.

SAMOKVASSOV (*beaming*). No, it's not my idea—it's your mother's orders. You have a fine mother.

ZINA (*nodding*). Yes.

SAMOKVASSOV (*agitatedly*). And generally, women are the best thing

we have—particularly now that men have turned somewhat soft and sour. You can believe me when I say this, for I've seen women. I've lived badly, coarsely—there is little I can recall without shame—but if there's been anything good and clean in my life it's women. I'm ready to pray to God that he may preserve them, for among us Russians he has nothing better than women.

DR. POTEKHIN *comes out of the house.*

DR. POTEKHIN. Oh, I say! Is that so?

SAMOKVASSOV (*turning to him*). Oh, it's you. You disagree, of course? Want to prove me wrong?

DR. POTEKHIN. This is neither the time nor the place for that.

SAMOKVASSOV (*heatedly*). This is the place all right for ironical exclamations, but not for truthful evidence? Why not?

DR. POTEKHIN (*walking past him*). You flare up like some lovesick Romeo. What's the matter with you?

SAMOKVASSOV. Nothing, thank you! How are you feeling? Here's something that will interest you, Zina. There was a time when our Doctor urged people to march onward, to stand up against fate. Today, as the song has it, all the enticements of the past no longer stir his disappointed heart!

ZINA. You mustn't get cross.

SAMOKVASSOV. But this is—this is deception. This is playing with human lives—

DR. POTEKHIN (*puffing on a cigar*). What are you so excited about? If you ask, they'll give you a job again with the police. (*Walks off.*)

ZINA (*in a pained voice*). Oh, Doctor—how can you?

SAMOKVASSOV (*gasping*). There's an educated man for you—eh? An honorable thing to say—eh?

ZINA. Perhaps he's not well?

SAMOKVASSOV. It seems not—he has paralysis of the soul. No, say what you will, we're all vicious and coarse—we love nobody, not even ourselves, nor our native land. We have bad, servile blood in our veins—we haven't yet outgrown serfdom—inwardly we're still slaves.

VUKOL *comes out of the house.*

VUKOL (*to* ZINA). Your mother wants you. What is it, Miron?

SAMOKVASSOV (*shaking his fist*). Your son—

VUKOL. I see.

SAMOKVASSOV. One day I'll do something to him—

VUKOL (*gazing into the distance*). Nobody loves my offspring.

SAMOKVASSOV. Does he? Whom does he love? And can he love?

VUKOL. I don't know. Never asked him.

SAMOKVASSOV. Ask him.

The DOCTOR *comes up.* SAMOKVASSOV, *with a grunt of disgust, goes into the house.*

VUKOL. Why do you abuse people?

DR. POTEKHIN. Let's walk, Father.

VUKOL. My foot objects to walking.

DR. POTEKHIN. Oh, yes. Now look—I'm going away—on the five-fifteen train. (*Pulls out his wallet.*) Here's some money. I'll send more later.

VUKOL. So you'll be away a long time. How about your job?

DR. POTEKHIN. I'll resign.

VUKOL. Are you going to the Caucasus, by any chance?

DR. POTEKHIN. Why the Caucasus?

VUKOL. In the old days men in your situation went to the faraway wild Caucasus.

DR. POTEKHIN. I don't understand.

VUKOL. You're in love?

DR. POTEKHIN (*glances frowning at his father, then laughs*). Well?

VUKOL. Without hope?

DR. POTEKHIN. Go on.

VUKOL (*taking the money*). You'd better go to Siberia.

DR. POTEKHIN. What for?

VUKOL. You'll make a pile of money. When one hates the sight of people, one needs lots of money.

DR. POTEKHIN. Stop joking. Tell them all here that I received a telegram calling me urgently to town to attend a patient.

VUKOL. Why tell a lie?

DR. POTEKHIN. You're right. To hell with it. Good-by.

VUKOL. Let me kiss you good-by. (*They embrace.*)

DR. POTEKHIN. Good-by. Life is a tough nut, old man.

VUKOL. I've sort of miscarried with you!

DR. POTEKHIN. You haven't been much of a success yourself.

VUKOL. Well, the best of luck! You're not thinking of shooting yourself, are you?

DR. POTEKHIN (*laughing slightly*). No, it hasn't come to that yet.

VUKOL. Look out! My advice is to fall in love with brunettes—they have more temperament and make up their minds quicker.

DR. POTEKHIN. Stop joking.

VUKOL. I'm serious. I speak from observation. You marry a Jewess—there's nothing more comfortable. They're fertile—you'll have children, and life will turn round and round like a wheel.

DR. POTEKHIN (*with a laugh*). Have you said everything?

VUKOL (*letting go the* DOCTOR'S *hand*). What I say is good. Good-by.

The DOCTOR *goes off. The old man sits down on the steps, shaking his head and whispering something after his son.* MEDVEDEVA *comes out, looking tired.*

MEDVEDEVA. Would you like something to eat? Tea is ready. Nobody wants to go to bed. Where's the Doctor? He's worn out—

VUKOL. Yes, he is. Rather early at his age, but he is.

MEDVEDEVA. Oh, you always talk in riddles—

VUKOL. He's left—asked to be remembered to everybody. He's gone to Siberia.

MEDVEDEVA. Are you out of your mind?

VUKOL (*with a wave of his hand*). To the Caucasus.

MEDVEDEVA. Where else?

VUKOL. I don't know.

MEDVEDEVA. You are a queer lot, all of you. It makes me feel sorry to look at you. Making jokes, too, as if you were all so gay—pretending to be clever and proud, feeling ashamed of your weaknesses before one another—what you should do is get together like good friends, have a heart-to-heart talk, and—never mind your shame—enjoy a good cry over yourselves. It's time you stopped playing roles—the theater is empty and there's nobody left but yourselves—just yourselves!

VUKOL. I've taken no part in the performance. I've been the audience.

MEDVEDEVA. Left alone with himself, each one of you is gripped with anguish, with remorse— But in front of others—my, my! how you puff up, what serious faces you put on! What I say is—forget all this—get closer to each other—

VUKOL. That's enough, my wise woman. I have nothing to do with it. But I'm telling you, my good old witch, my son has really disappeared—

MEDVEDEVA (*indifferently*). Where to?

VUKOL. Maybe to Africa—maybe to the devil!

MEDVEDEVA (*somewhat incredulously*). Well, you and your son do seem given to fancy stunts. You'd better go in and have tea.

The two move toward the door, as MASTAKOV *and* ZINA *come out.* Have you heard about the Doctor? He's gone away.

MASTAKOV. And a good thing, too. Nobody needs him here. (*To* ZINA.) Let's go for a little walk, shall we?

ZINA. I don't mind. It's close here, and I'm a bit giddy.

MASTAKOV (*not knowing what to talk about*). Perhaps you should take some drops?

ZINA (*smiling*). What sort of drops?

MASTAKOV. I don't know. (*He sighs.*) Elena never takes medicine. But Olga Vladimirovna—she takes drops of some kind. Sometimes there's an overpowering smell from her, something like ether. And her perfume hits you too—

ZINA (*with interest*). Do you like her?

MASTAKOV. Her? Well, what shall I say? Not always, I think. (*With deliberate animation.*) Ah, what a beautiful night! It makes you want to sing.

ZINA (*reproachfully*). What? Sing here?

MASTAKOV. You're right. It was a stupid idea— Besides, I can't sing—

(*Trying to fall in with* ZINA's *tone.*) Of course—people are born and die—day and night—

ZINA (*with an involuntary smile*). You say that as if you were reproaching them for it.

MASTAKOV (*embarrassed*). Do I? There you are, confound it! (*Simply.*) I suppose it's because I don't know how to speak when there's somebody dead in the house. I've read so often of the horrors of death and it's always so badly written that I've lost all respect for and interest in the subject. Death has been written about too much—it's come to resemble an overpraised actress. The actress always does the same things, but everybody shouts, "Ah, what genius!" (*Carried away, he takes* ZINA *by the arm.*) Naturally I too shall have to die—one fine day. But before that day arrives, dear girl, I'll have lived thousands of beautiful days—you understand?—thousands. And every day there will be new faces, new experiences, new colors in the sun. (*Seriously.*) Do you know that the sun is different every day? Have you ever read of the Slavic god of the sun and his mermaid daughters? Do you like mythology?

ZINA. I don't know it.

MASTAKOV. Oh, you should! It's extraordinarily beautiful—and, as always with anything childlike, simple, wise, and inexpressibly moving. You must read about that—you're a little mermaid yourself. Sometimes I look at you and think—happy will be the man you'll come to love. I picture myself in his place—it's really wonderful, full of the most unpredictable surprises—

ZINA (*embarrassed*). Now, really—this is hardly the time for such—

OLGA, *in a dark dress and carrying a bunch of flowers, enters the front garden. She stops in the shrubbery and listens.*

MASTAKOV (*carried away*). If you only knew what a happy thing it is to be able to picture yourself in any guise you desire—a king, a chimney sweep, a clown! You live dozens of lives, feel all the joys and sorrows of men and women—the dull, heavy thoughts of the old people and the endearing, opalescent confusion of the child's soul—

ZINA. That must be terribly interesting.

MASTAKOV. A short way from here there's a boulder lying—an old, grave-looking rock, with wrinkles all over it—I know that ages ago it was the top of a mountain, and stars were nearer to it than they are now. It misses this, and feels bored—you understand? I could tell the story of this boulder in four lines—just four severe lines. You see? That's the way one lives. All of a sudden I may fall in love with you, and think of you all day long—carry your image in my heart while it sings to me delightful, marvelous songs—

ZINA (*breaking away from him*). For goodness' sake! How can you say such things to me—today?

MASTAKOV (*surprised*). Mustn't I?

She walks away from him with quick steps and disappears from view.

When can I then? A strange girl.

OLGA (*coming out, ironically*). You were too hasty.

MASTAKOV (*frightened*). You're at it again? Look, Elena's here.

OLGA. So that's the reason you don't come to see me? That's the work that keeps you so occupied?

MASTAKOV (*in an alarmed, low voice*). If you two meet, I don't know what I'm going to do—

OLGA (*trying to preserve her composure*). You don't know? Really?

MASTAKOV. Honestly—

OLGA. Honesty—and you?

MASTAKOV. When people stare at each other with fierce eyes, I feel ashamed, I—I feel I'm utterly superfluous.

OLGA. Do you realize what you're saying?

MASTAKOV. Ah, realize—realize! I don't—I always do stupid things!

OLGA. Don't try to fool me!

MASTAKOV. Please, don't shout.

OLGA. What is this? An attempt to turn your relations with me into a joke? It's a poor scheme, and a low one.

MASTAKOV. Now why do you take this tone? What have I done to you? You're not an innocent virgin—and I simply cannot marry you right away. It's ridiculous! Really, it's ridiculous!

OLGA (*in a lower tone*). No more of your mockery, please. I demand an explanation. I don't know—after all, it's cruel, it's filthy! Now listen to me, preacher of goodness and beauty, or whatever it is they call you— ELENA *comes out of the house.*

MASTAKOV (*beginning to lose his temper*). I'm explaining to you plainly enough—

OLGA (*spotting* ELENA). Ah, my dear sir, now I'll make a little scandal for your benefit—it will embarrass you.

MASTAKOV. What are you going to do? Damn it, what do you want?

OLGA (*throwing away the flowers*). Elena Nikolayevna—permit me to remind you of your own words—we're both women—

ELENA (*wrapping herself in her shawl, comes over, speaking in a low voice*). Please, let's go away from here.

OLGA. Only you're cleverer than I am—you've managed to arrange things so that—I feel I'm going mad!

ELENA. You've chosen a bad place, Constantin.

MASTAKOV (*roughly*). I chose nothing. And I understand nothing. What is it I am required to do? To go and get married at once? Hear the priest say: Be thou exalted, O Bridegroom, like unto Abraham—and thou, O Bride, Be thou exalted like unto Sarah?

OLGA. What a vulgar jest! Listen, he's been declaring his love to Zina—

MASTAKOV (*surprised*). I?

OLGA. He's carrying her image in his heart, he was telling her—

MASTAKOV. Now, that's really too stupid.

OLGA (*frantically*). This is not stupidity. It has another name—philandering, licentiousness— I'm ashamed of myself—never in my life have I been in such a ridiculous, idiotic, humiliating position—yes, I have to admit that.

MASTAKOV (*looks at each woman in turn*). Well, I've had enough of it! Say what you like, do what you will—I'm through—I'm going away. I won't be dragged on a rope even to heaven. I've done no harm to anybody, caused no suffering—it's I who am suffering!

OLGA (*to* ELENA). What brazen impudence!

ELENA (*calmly*). Let's avoid strong words—they don't clear up anything.

MASTAKOV. Against all evidence, you choose to blame me for something in which—in which—you took part as well, if my memory serves me right— One moment. Am I already condemned? That's splendid. I'm leaving, Elena—I'll go and pack my things—you can finish me off in my absence.

OLGA. This is preposterous! Can a normal man behave like that? Or is he just too clever? I don't understand!

MASTAKOV (*heatedly*). Stop blathering! I'm leaving. I can't live like this—everybody claims the right to treat me like a serf— And anyway, what's this got to do with Zina? You asked me yourself, Elena, to distract that widowed maiden! (*In a calmer and simpler tone.*) If I'm really at fault, I apologize—yes, quite sincerely. But I'll say this—true words were spoken about women when somebody said—I forget what he said—you make one forget everything!

He goes out of the front garden quickly. OLGA *follows him with her eyes, at a loss how to take it.* ELENA, *her face overcast, is absorbed in thought.*

OLGA (*quietly*). Is he really going away?

ELENA. I don't think so. (*There is a pause.*)

OLGA (*in a depressed tone*). So we are facing each other again. You *have* placed me in a ridiculous position after all. It was you who did it, wasn't it?

ELENA (*quietly*). No, I didn't do it.

OLGA. H'm—I have to go now. (ELENA *is silent.*) See here, you spoke so much about the common interests of women and lofty ideas—But how can you forgive him this—these low pranks—this dissoluteness?

ELENA. I must not have spoken clearly enough last time. It's my fault, and I'm sorry for it.

OLGA (*with intent to hurt*). You should have heard him talk to Zina about his love!

ELENA. Tomorrow he may repeat it to some other girl or to you—

OLGA (*bitterly*). Oh, no! I'll certainly not stand for any such mockery from him.

ELENA. I told you before—he's like a sleep walker—he lives and believes in his dreams—

OLGA. Then have him treated. Place him in a hospital. Put him on a chain.

ELENA. You don't have to be rude. Don't you like listening to his stories?

OLGA. Now they will remind me only of my humiliation. Does it make you happy to hear this? (ELENA *glances at her in silence.*) You're a strange person—it's hard to believe you. (*Pensively.*) I thought he was so pure, so honest—

ELENA. He is that.

OLGA (*with a light laugh*). Is he? But I don't understand. Don't you feel insulted? Well, it's really none of my business.

ELENA. Let's not talk about me. If he or I have caused you any pain, I'm ready to ask your forgiveness both for him and for myself.

OLGA (*taken aback, incredulously*). You, a woman, are asking me to forgive you—asking me who— I cannot believe you, I can't! What is it? Christian meekness? Generosity? Please tell me.

ELENA. I'm a woman, but I hold with being rational.

OLGA. I don't believe it. Your speeches are too odd. He must have unhinged your mind—that clown! There are times when I feel you're a sincere woman—and at those moments, honestly, my heart aches for you— (*Reflectively.*) Probably because we women are really close to one another— But I'll go mad, too, if I continue this outlandish conversation. Good-by. (*Goes off, but returns immediately and speaks seriously and simply.*) Listen, I want to tell you something—it seems I have to tell you, though I don't know why—it must be a slight case of madness. Anyway, I'm not in the least repentant. You see, I flirted with him—was eager to score a victory over a man— I don't know why I needed that—perhaps I just wanted to be on an equal footing with you, or even above you—it irritates me to see you so stately, so calm, being what you call so rational—this is probably a new kind of female cunning—a method I'm not familiar with. (*Speaks as if to herself.*) For a long time he took no notice of my attacks—you know, of course, how that affects us women— He kept telling me tales about the Hindus, the birches, the Kalevala, the Russian peasants—he talks marvelously sometimes—as if he were not human. Well, apparently I was seriously carried away—and, anxious to win the game quickly—lost it! (*She feels confused and painfully embarrassed, and tries to conceal this by a certain pertness and casualness of speech.*) I understood this very soon—especially after my conversation with you—you speak far more convincingly with your intonation and eyes—but your words—I don't always understand those strange words of yours. (*With a light laugh.*) You're younger than I am—but your heart is fading—

are you aware of it? I don't wish to hurt you, but, honestly, sometimes you irritate me. How can anyone treat a man as you do? It's really too funny for words. But that dreamer of yours—what a character! He's like an eel—he's certainly no fool—and it seems not a bad actor, either. There's an elastic something—a strong spring in him which I can't quite make out—he's pretty cunning, I must say. At times he can be excruciatingly funny—I think it's a method of self-defense with him —don't you? (*Coming out of the reverie.*) Oh, I've been talking too much.

ELENA (*quietly*). Thank you.

OLGA (*comically and bitterly*). For what? But if you feel like that—your hand, comrade! I hope one day you'll get as good a beating as I have. (*With convincing curiosity.*) It must be hard to live with such a slippery devil? But breathtakingly interesting? Isn't it?

ELENA (*weakening for a moment, and answering with similar fervor*). Oh, it is!

OLGA (*recoiling*). Ah! So that's the sort of woman you are? Well, in that case—he's a fool! Good-by. You're an extraordinarily tangled-up woman. I too have made a fool of myself. Well, I'll go away. You'd like to see me go?

ELENA (*gazing at her with a smile*). What can your going change?

OLGA. Really! Still, it'll be quieter.

ELENA (*proudly, with some pain*). He'll be the same all his life—he'll never change.

OLGA (*after a long look at her*). No, I don't understand you—I can't.

She goes off slowly. ELENA *sinks wearily onto a garden seat.* MEDVEDEVA *pops her head out from the porch, then comes down hesitantly, seats herself beside* ELENA, *and strokes her hair.*

ELENA (*in a low voice*). It's hard to bear—did you hear it?

MEDVEDEVA. Never mind—it'll pass. She talked too loud. Vukol pricked up his ears and right away was all smiles, the old devil. I started a conversation to stop his eavesdropping, and Samokvassov saw what I was about and helped me. A very tactful man, this Samokvassov. Zina has gone to sleep, thank God—stretched out on the sofa with her clothes on— (*Nudging* ELENA.) And Samokvassov keeps driving the gnats away from her— Oh, these human beings! You dear human beings! (*Pauses, absorbed in thought.*) Did she bring these flowers? Lilies, pinks—beautiful flowers. And she threw them on the ground—why? (*Picking up the flowers.*) She must be a homeless creature—starved in her heart—with all her money! No, money doesn't feed your soul— She was getting into such a temper, too—I could hear it— She's eight or ten years older than you, but there it is! Here now! Somebody's coming. Look—your man!

MASTAKOV *comes into the garden. His hat is pushed back, his clothes disarranged. One of the fingers of his left hand is bandaged with a handkerchief. His expression is fixed, somber.*

MASTAKOV (*showing his finger to* ELENA, *sullenly*). There, Elena, I've jammed my finger.

ELENA. Let me see. Sit down.

MASTAKOV (*with conviction*). Sasha's a spiteful, lazy fool. A most unpleasant character. Not a trace of intelligence—there's something catfish about her. I had words with her.

MEDVEDEVA (*rises, with a smile*). I have some ointment inside. I'll go get it.

ELENA. Please. MEDVEDEVA *goes in.*

MASTAKOV. Careful, Lena—I'm no stone.

ELENA. What were you doing at home?

MASTAKOV. What? I was packing— How can I live in a place where everybody drums into my ears, "You're mine," "You're ours"?

ELENA (*frowning*). Don't invent things, please. I never said anything of the sort to you.

MASTAKOV. It makes no difference. You too have the instincts of a slaveowner. (*After a pause.*) I've already packed everything from my desk—only I spilled a bottle of Eau de Cologne and had to take it all out again. (*Whistles a tune.*) I also spilled ink on the sofa. Sasha upset that dingy reddish vase—she'll blame me, of course. I'm glad the vase got smashed. I dislike reddish things—and redheaded people. (*Glances at* ELENA *out of the corner of his eye.*) You don't mind my going away? It doesn't disturb you, does it? (ELENA *makes no reply.*) I can't work when the devil knows what goes on around me! Everybody with a sullen smile. Nikolay continually grunting, "Your wife is a saint." You a saint, ha! He's an owl, that Doctor—and it's no secret to me that he's fallen in love with you— That's been the cause of everything— (*Magnanimously.*) I have no desire to be in anybody's way, and you'll hear no reproaches from me—

ELENA (*quietly*). Stop talking nonsense! You don't have to put on an act with me.

MASTAKOV (*after a pause*). Did you quarrel—you and she?

ELENA. No. She's leaving.

MASTAKOV (*with animation*). Honestly?

ELENA. Yes.

MASTAKOV (*with relief*). That's fine! That's really splendid, Lena! Let her go away some place—yes, let her. She's a very good woman—and has a kind heart—but she's intolerably despotic.

ELENA (*quietly, with a touch of bitterness*). Aren't you ashamed to speak like that of a woman you offended? Don't you realize you've wronged her?

MASTAKOV (*looks intently at* ELENA). Her? You say I've wronged her? (*Pauses, then continues simply and warmly.*) Listen, Lena—I'm terribly ashamed of the way I've treated you. I'm to blame, and don't I know it! But the trouble is I can't behave myself—I have no time to think of you, or even of myself, for that matter— There's a broad

highway in my breast, over which little thoughts and a motley crowd of little men keep moving incessantly, elbowing one another, shouting, living—and with all this I forget about you. It's wrong, I admit —but truly, I can't do otherwise, it's beyond my powers. What a somber face you have! You're angry with me, of course—think my conduct inexcusable—and all that sort of thing—

ELENA (*sharply*). Am I complaining? Have I accused you of anything? All I'd like to ask of you is to show more consideration to other people—to strangers. Don't help the weak and unhappy become bitter—that won't make them either stronger or happier—

MASTAKOV. You see, if she's leaving, I'd better stay on, eh? I don't want to meet her on the way.

ELENA (*smiling involuntarily*). Is there only one way from here?

MASTAKOV (*hurt*). You want me to go? There, Lena, our wishes always clash—you see?

ELENA (*taking his hand*). Don't talk like that—you're being insincere and trying to clown your way out of things—yes, you are. Now listen to me carefully—and what I'm going to say to you now—you may believe me—I won't repeat, ever! I don't want to stand in your way in anything that may enrich your inner world—give greater beauty to it. I swear to God this is the truth!

MASTAKOV (*seriously*). I believe you. I always believe you. I realize I've caused you pain—I didn't mean to—sometimes it's hard to know where the human being ends and the woman begins! Well, it happened, Elena, and it's no use talking about it—words won't heal a wounded heart—that I know!

ELENA (*anxiously, with feeling*). I want you to understand—it frightens me when something trivial and vulgar comes too close to you—touches you—

MASTAKOV (*laughing, kisses her hands gently*). Oh, don't be afraid. I'm a cunning fellow! Life gets to be very difficult unless you dissemble. I often play the fool and the innocent who doesn't know what he's doing—that helps a lot in keeping all that's trivial and vulgar at arm's length. Sometimes I appear ludicrous—in spite of myself—I know that. But knowing it, when I notice I'm being ludicrous, I turn this to my advantage, too, as a means of self-defense. You think it's wrong? Perhaps it is. But it saves one from trivial worries. (*Pauses for a moment, thinking.*) Life is more interesting and more honest than human beings. There's wonderful beauty in this human life of ours, and it's a joy to be a dewdrop reflecting a ray of light at sunrise! Lena, my friend, my good friend, it seems to me that all the people—that everybody around you and me—are living their second and third lives. They're born old, and are too lazy to live. Yes, they're born old. But I was born only once—I came to this world as a child, and I'm happy to be young—and I love with a boundless love all this —everything that's alive!

MEDVEDEVA *comes out onto the stoop with the ointment. She looks at* MASTAKOV *and* ELENA *and, smiling, withdraws quietly.*

I'm glad that I'm alive, I'm drunk with the joy of living, and I feel I want to tell everybody born for the first time how happy I am— you understand me, Lena?

ELENA. I do.

MASTAKOV. Don't forgive what I did, but forget it— Will you?

ELENA. I will.

CURTAIN

VASSA ZHELEZNOVA

The Zheleznov family represent a distinct social group. Although of the merchant class, they are not typical either of the old merchant families or of the better educated business people in the cities. Theirs are the first and second generations of the self-made bourgeoisie, and they are still pretty close to their peasant roots. Being newly arrived on the social scene, they have no pride in their family record. But neither are they educated enough to rise above the traditional views of their class.

The old Russian and generally oriental idea of business is expressed in the popular adage: "If you don't cheat, you won't sell." In the native business circles untouched by European influences this principle was accepted as a law of nature. On the other hand, it somehow never interfered with the religious consciousness of the same people as expressed in the idea of sin. Sins were not to be taken lightly, but one could sin all one's life yet save one's soul by repentance or good deeds in old age. Vassa Zheleznova in this play is fully aware of the sin of cheating, not to say murdering people, and to some extent is even perturbed by the thought of it. But although cheating is natural to a merchant (she and her husband have done a great deal of that), and although other sins, not excepting murder, may be natural to a mother (she herself does not hesitate to commit them), she knows that sins are sins and that only the martyrdom of the soul which they inflict upon one may be able to redeem them. With all her tolerance of evil Vassa is a good and deeply religious woman.

A. B.

VASSA ZHELEZNOVA
(Mother)

CHARACTERS

DUNYA, a distant relative of the ZHELEZNOVS
LIPA, a maid in the ZHELEZNOVS' house
VASSA PETROVNA ZHELEZNOVA, wife of ZAKHAR ZHELEZNOV
MIKHAIL VASSILYEV, manager of the ZHELEZNOV firm
PAVEL ZHELEZNOV, VASSA'S son
NATALYA, SEMYON ZHELEZNOV'S wife
SEMYON ZHELEZNOV, VASSA'S son
PROKHOR ZHELEZNOV, VASSA'S brother-in-law
LYUDMILA (LYUDA), PAVEL ZHELEZNOV'S wife and MIKHAIL VASSILYEV'S daughter
ANNA, VASSA'S daughter
ANISYA, a maid in the ZHELEZNOVS' house

ACT I

A large room in the ZHELEZNOV *house which is both* VASSA'S *bedroom and her private office. A bed in a corner, shut off by a screen. Left, a desk cluttered with papers, with tiles serving as paper weights. Close by, a high, long-legged desk. Behind it, under the window, a sofa. Several lamps with green shades. In the right corner, a tiled stove; near it a safe and a door to a small private chapel. Pinned to the screen are some papers which rustle when anybody walks past them. In the back, a broad open doorway showing a dining room with a table over which hangs a chandelier. A candle is burning on the desk.*
It is early morning of a winter day. DUNYA *is laying the table for tea.* LIPA *comes in with a steaming samovar.*

DUNYA (*quietly*). Has she come back?
LIPA. No.
DUNYA. My God! What's going to happen now?
LIPA. How do I know?

She comes down into VASSA'S *room and looks it over.* VASSA *enters through the chapel door, straightening her spectacles and the hair above her temples. She looks at the clock on the wall above her desk.*

VASSA. Why are you late? You see, it's a quarter after eight.
LIPA. Zakhar Ivanovich felt bad again toward morning.
VASSA (*crossing over to the desk*). Is there a telegram for me?
LIPA. No.
VASSA. Everybody up?
LIPA. Pavel Zakharovich hasn't even been to bed yet—
VASSA. Is he unwell?
LIPA. Lyudmila Mikhailovna didn't sleep at home.
VASSA (*in a low voice*). Watch out, Lipa. I'll—show you!
LIPA (*frightened*). What have I done?
VASSA. Nothing much, except tell me unpleasant news with relish.
LIPA. Vassa Petrovna! I told you that only to—
VASSA. Go now—call everybody to tea. Dunya, bring my cup over here. Wait, Lipa. If Lyudmila is still asleep, don't wake her, you understand? She spent the night at her father's. Send him over to me—
DUNYA (*bringing in a cup of tea*). Good morning, Vassa dear—
VASSA. Good morning.
DUNYA. Oh, Vassa dear—Zakhar had such a bad night—
VASSA. Did he say anything?
DUNYA. Say anything! He just blinks—that's all.
VASSA. Keep your ears open for what they'll be saying in there about Lyudmila. Go have your tea

DUNYA *goes back to the dining room.* VASSA *puts her elbows on the desk, pushes up her spectacles, and frowns, her lips moving.* *Enter* MIKHAIL.

MIKHAIL. Good morning.

VASSA. Where's your daughter? You're a fine father!

MIKHAIL. I can't do anything—it's beyond my power.

VASSA. We've ruined the boy.

MIKHAIL. And her too.

VASSA. Let them all think she spent the night at your place—

MIKHAIL. I understand.

VASSA. I'd pull her hair— (*Smiling.*) It wouldn't help, would it?

MIKHAIL (*with a sigh*). No. Nor is she to blame. She didn't marry Pavel of her own free will. And you knew yourself it wouldn't work.

VASSA (*softly*). There, there—naughty boy. How's Zakhar?

MIKHAIL. Bad.

VASSA (*in a low voice*). He couldn't sign the paper?

MIKHAIL. No. I'll have to do it.

VASSA. Has the priest agreed?

MIKHAIL. Yes. It will cost five hundred.

VASSA. Oh, well. It's his opportunity. And the others?

MIKHAIL. Everything is in order.

VASSA (*with a sigh*). When it's all over, we'll decide what to do about the children.

MIKHAIL. It'll have to be done. There may be trouble otherwise.

VASSA (*reflectively*). Anna hasn't arrived yet—and no telegram from her. Dunya, more tea. (PAVEL *enters the dining room.*) Who's in there?

PAVEL. It's me.

VASSA. Oh, Pavel— Why are you hiding? You might say good morning to your mother—

PAVEL (*coming into* VASSA's *room*). Very well. Good morning! Ah, you're here, father-in-law! Where's your daughter?

MIKHAIL (*ungraciously*). I'll ask you that—the church and the law have made her yours—you should ask yourself—

VASSA. Go, Mikhail Vassilyevich— MIKHAIL *goes off.*

PAVEL (*after him*). Myself? Is that so? (*Rushes to his mother.*) Mother darling. I feel ashamed—I can't bear it— Help me— You love me, don't you? I know you do.

VASSA. There, there— Don't let it upset you. Wait.

PAVEL. What's there to wait for? I can't bear it any more.

VASSA. I told you she wasn't the right match for you. You should have married a quiet girl—

PAVEL. A monstrosity? Being a monstrosity myself, I should have a monstrosity for a wife? Lame and deformed?

VASSA (*blowing out the candle*). Stop it. Today people laugh at tears and sob stories. Stop it, sonny.

PAVEL. My God! Zheleznov's wife a loose woman! Doesn't it make your heart bleed, Mother? Doesn't it make you feel ashamed?

VASSA. I told you to stop it. Well? Go have your tea. (*She walks into the dining room. Speaks to* DUNYA.) Why don't you put the light out, you convent ninny?

PAVEL. Mother! Give me some money. I'm going into town— I can't stay here—I can't.

VASSA. Father's on his deathbed, and you'll go into town? What else can you think up? You're so clever!

PAVEL. What do you want me to do, then?

He throws himself on the sofa and cries. In the dining room NATALYA *comes up to* VASSA *and kisses her hand.*

VASSA. Overslept?

NATALYA. I was with Father till three o'clock. (*Listens, and speaks in a frightened tone.*) Who's crying?

VASSA. Pavel, shame on you! You behave like a stupid hysterical woman.

NATALYA (*entering* VASSA's *room*). What's the matter, Pavel? Dunya, bring a glass of water.

VASSA. Oh, Lord! (DUNYA *looks at her questioningly.*) Well, what have you been told? Get him some water— Oh, Pavel, if I could only hide you somewhere—

PAVEL. Yes, I know— You're ashamed not of what's happened to me, but of me myself. Don't look at me, Natalya, leave me alone— I don't want anything.

NATALYA. Go to your room— You're a man, you shouldn't cry.

PAVEL. Don't touch me—I'm repulsive to you—I'm a cripple— my wife's a loose woman—

As PAVEL *goes off,* MIKHAIL *enters the dining room. Tugging at his mustache,* MIKHAIL *follows him morosely with his eyes.*

VASSA. What is it?

MIKHAIL (*continuing down into* VASSA's *room*). Please come here.

VASSA. Well? Leave us, Dunya.

MIKHAIL. Lyudmila went with Uncle—

VASSA (*steadying herself with her hand against the wall*). With Prokhor? Where to?

MIKHAIL. To the farm—

VASSA. With him— For a minute I thought they ran away. You gave me a fright— Does Pavel know?

MIKHAIL. He'll hear about it— I'm sick, and afraid. My daughter's ruined and the business I've served all my life is going to pieces—

VASSA (*in a tone of annoyance*). Don't carry on so— I don't carry on, do I?

MIKHAIL. I have no hope, so long as he is—

VASSA (*reflectively*). So Prokhor is determined—

MIKHAIL. He's an enemy to everybody.

VASSA. Don't croak like a raven, I tell you. Our business is going to pieces—we'll see about that!

MIKHAIL (*with fierce emotion*). He's considered to be kind, a man of conscience— I know these things—conscience and kindness. I've seen them— In business they're like sand in a machine. And it's all nothing but tomfoolery. Who wants kindness? Nobody. Give me what I'm worth, and let it go at that. You can keep your soft words and playful ways. It's when a man has nothing to attract attention that he plays at conscience. And all around him people only weep because of his playfulness—and no business can be carried on in a proper way— No, he's a harmful man—

VASSA (*as if waking up*). What are you going to do about him?

MIKHAIL. What? Ah—

VASSA. Well, go ahead.

MIKHAIL (*after a pause*). I'll wait— You ought to go and see your husband—

VASSA. You're right. No telegram from Anna yet.

MIKHAIL. Why are you counting on her so much?

VASSA (*on the way out*). Don't talk—you don't know her.

MIKHAIL (*following* VASSA). It's a hard life—

VASSA. It's simple to have an easy life. Only I've been told people grow stupid on it in short order—

They go off. DUNYA *enters quietly, sits at the table and, making a sign of the cross, murmurs to herself.*

DUNYA. O Lord, preserve and have mercy on your servants in all their ways—O Lord! LIPA *rushes in.*

LIPA. Where's the mistress? She's come.

DUNYA. Who? Anna?

LIPA. Lyudmila was out with her uncle all night—my, my! Such goings on! *Enter* SEMYON.

SEMYON. What goings on?

LIPA (*running off*). Oh, nothing! Just this and that!

SEMYON. This and that! Quack, quack! Idiot! Come on, Dunya, pour me some tea.

DUNYA. Good morning, Senya dear.

SEMYON. Same to you. How's Father?

DUNYA. Oh, he's very low.

SEMYON. H'm—he's been suffering too long. (*Yawns.*) Has everybody had tea?

DUNYA. Pavel didn't touch his—his wife spent the night out.

SEMYON (*pleasantly surprised*). Did she indeed?

DUNYA (*gushing with excitement*). She did! With Prokhor, they say. Oh, yes!

SEMYON. No, really? What do you know! That curly-headed devil of an uncle! He got what he was after! Believe me, he's a smart fellow!

DUNYA. He got it, it seems. And what a disgrace—

SEMYON. Ah, what a face Pavel will have now! *Enter* PROKHOR.

PROKHOR (*muttering to himself as he walks in*). I'll box your ears, you wait—

SEMYON. Whose ears?

PROKHOR. The cripple's. Dirty scum! Let a cat into my pigeon house again. That lopsided Rigoletto! He made me so angry my legs are still shaking—

SEMYON (*grinning*). Why are you so mussed up and red-eyed? Did you sleep in your clothes?

PROKHOR (*looking himself over*). Me? Yes, I did. Damn! I'll have to change.

SEMYON. You certainly will.

PROKHOR. Pour me some tea, my little hyena. Ah, that scarecrow, Pavel! The cat killed three of my best pigeons.

SEMYON. I wonder what grudge he has against you?

PROKHOR. Now, there! Know your limits and don't break your neck! He's a fool. The woman should go on the stage, or something like that—she's no wife for him. *Enter* LIPA. Well?

LIPA. The manager is asking—

PROKHOR. I'm all the manager you need to worry about. And don't snoop around here—scat!

SEMYON (*to* LIPA). What does he want?

LIPA (*diffidently*). He asks if he can see—

PROKHOR. Me? He can't. I'm invisible. Tell him he's a fool and a crook. LIPA *goes off.*

SEMYON (*laughing*). Can crooks be fools?

PROKHOR. In our country, my boy, even crooks are not too clever.

SEMYON. I like to see you out of sorts—you're awfully funny!

PROKHOR. Thank you. You have a statesmanlike brain, my friend, you really have. *Enter* LYUDMILA, *wearing a dressing gown.*

LYUDMILA. Good morning. (DUNYA *bows silently;* SEMYON *clicks his heels, grinning;* PROKHOR *twists his mustache and grunts.*) I'll have milk. What makes you so happy, Semyon?

SEMYON. All nature rejoices at the sight of you.

PROKHOR. Animals too.

SEMYON (*laughing*). Am I an animal?

PROKHOR. If you say all nature, that takes in the animals—including yourself.

SEMYON (*roaring with laughter*). By George! That's rich!

LYUDMILA (*to* DUNYA). You see, his father's dying, and he laughs. (SEMYON *instantly assumes a serious air.*) You ought to teach him good manners, Dunya, as you used to teach me.

DUNYA. I—

SEMYON (*apologetically*). Father has been sick for seven months now—

PROKHOR. A resolute man like him, and can't resolve to die—

DUNYA (*involuntarily*). Oh, Lord—

PROKHOR. What's that?

DUNYA. I just—

PROKHOR. Just what?

LYUDMILA (*to* DUNYA). You realize this is no place for you. Uncle Prokhor is an immoral man, and it's indelicate for a girl like you to be sitting in his company. (DUNYA *goes off.*) I dislike spies. (*To* PROKHOR.) Listen, Spaniard!

SEMYON. Wonderful likeness!

PROKHOR. Have you ever seen a Spaniard? Nitwit!

SEMYON. I have. I saw one dancing in the circus.

LYUDMILA (*to* PROKHOR). I'm going to bed now. I'll be up at four, and you plan to be ready— Agreed?

SEMYON. Going for a ride?

LYUDMILA. Yes—in a troika.

PROKHOR. Want to come along? Bring your wife, and let's all go.

SEMYON (*scratching his head, in a dispirited tone*). She won't go. And also, Pavel—

PROKHOR. What about him?

SEMYON. Well—it's awkward—

LYUDMILA. You find it awkward? Why?

SEMYON *chuckles embarrassedly.* PROKHOR *stares at him, shaking his head with a hopeless air. Enter* VASSA.

VASSA. Go over to the office, Semyon. SEMYON *goes off.*

PROKHOR (*after* SEMYON). And don't be too clever giving orders, the way you were last time.

VASSA (*to* LYUDMILA). Have you seen me today?

LYUDMILA. No.

VASSA. Why don't you say good morning?

LYUDMILA (*affectionately*). Oh, forgive me. I forgot—

PROKHOR (*rising*). Good morning.

VASSA (*evading* LYUDMILA's *attempt to kiss her, and speaking calmly and sternly*). What are you doing, Lyudmila?

LYUDMILA (*after a pause*). I don't know, Mother—honestly! I don't know— (*Goes off quickly.*)

PROKHOR. Boom!

VASSA (*in a soft, conciliatory tone*). Prokhor Ivanovich, you're a man of intelligence, you're not evil-minded—

PROKHOR. A man of intelligence, that's the important thing.

VASSA. You must understand, then, that your actions bring shame upon our whole family and our old business—

PROKHOR. I've heard these speeches from brother Zakhar more than once and I've always answered him that it's too late to teach me—

VASSA (*in a lower voice*). Have you no consideration for the young woman—a girl practically? She has her life to live yet—

PROKHOR. Excuse me! I understand young women and girls much better than you do. And I may add I also see through many women of more advanced years—

VASSA (*slowly*). Pavel is your nephew.

PROKHOR. Will you be so kind as to tell him, then, that if he continues to bait my pigeons with cats I'll box his ears.

VASSA (*after a pause*). So you're an enemy to the family?

PROKHOR. Lay off the family, please. Family! At your kind prompting my ailing brother very nearly ruined me—you haven't forgotten that, have you? Family? No, thank you. You've swallowed up thirty thousand of my money—that's enough. Ha!

VASSA (*quietly*). So you want a fight?

PROKHOR. What? How do you mean? With whom?

VASSA. With your nephews, I take it.

PROKHOR. Don't play your tricky fugues on me, you won't wriggle out of it! No fights for me. There's the law, Vassa Petrovna, something called the Roman law, which says: Mine is mine! When Zakhar departs this vale of tears, we'll divide the property peacefully, and none of your slippery roulades. Now, by your leave—my heart's bothering me—

Goes off, clutching at his breast. VASSA *stares after him, leaning forward peculiarly, as if about to jump on him. Enter* NATALYA, *who sits down at the table and pours herself some tea.*

VASSA. How's Pavel?

NATALYA. He's calmed down a little. (*There is a pause.* VASSA *paces the room.*) I feel sorry for him.

VASSA. What?

NATALYA. I say I feel sorry for him—

VASSA (*after a pause*). Well, I feel sorry for convicts—some of those in jail are quite innocent, and have no work to do—yet they were accustomed to work when they were free. I'm sorry for those who want work, and can't get it.

NATALYA. Some people live worse than convicts.

VASSA (*reflectively*). Nobody ever felt sorry for me. When Zakhar decided to go bankrupt, I was with Pavel—six months gone— The affair could end in a trial and jail—at that time we secretly loaned money against pledged valuables—our trunks were packed with them, and we had to hide everything away. So I said, Zakhar dear, wait a while—let me bear the child first. And he—he bellowed at me so I shook in my shoes. For two more months I carried on with the child in fear and trembling of what was in store for us.

NATALYA. That's probably why Pavel was born a cripple.

VASSA. That happened later—he was five years old when I began to notice he was going lopsided— Yes— And what I went through besides!

NATALYA. Did you have a talk with the man you fired the other day?

VASSA. What was there to talk about? You can't do your job, out you go!

NATALYA. Didn't you speak to him about life?

VASSA. Whose life?

NATALYA. All life—everybody's.

VASSA. I don't understand what you're talking about.

NATALYA (*with conviction*). Well, he says every job or business is a sin.

VASSA (*surprised*). What a fool!

NATALYA. Why?

VASSA. I don't know why—only he's a fool.

NATALYA. You run down everybody.

VASSA (*with a smile*). So business is a sin? Work is a sin? What people will think up—to excuse their laziness. I remember a pilgrim used to come to our house—that was before you came here— He would sit in the kitchen and go on preaching—just like that one—all work of human hands is nothing but sin. So I said to him, you lay down that piece of bread, my good man, don't touch it, don't eat it, it was made by hands. Don't sin, my friend, and get out of here— And out he went.

NATALYA (*in a low voice*). He may have been right, though—

VASSA (*not listening to* NATALYA, *rings the bell*). People play tricks with their brains. Zakhar didn't, and rose from a simple peasant to be what he is.

NATALYA (*rising*). And to be dying.

VASSA. Well, he's lived his life.

NATALYA. You've complained about him.

VASSA. The woman in me complained. He was a wanton man all his life, and he's dying of his wantonness. Aside from that, he's worth his weight in gold, no praise can be too high for him. *Enter* LIPA.

NATALYA (*going off.*) You always say one thing one day, and another the next.

VASSA (*under her breath*). The fool. (*To* LIPA.) Who was with Prokhor early last night?

LIPA. Some man he called Yevgeny Mironych.

VASSA. The lawyer from town. What did they talk about?

LIPA. I didn't hear.

VASSA. Why didn't you?

LIPA. They locked the door.

VASSA. What about the vent from his stove? Did you forget?

LIPA. They spoke very quietly—

VASSA. Look out, Lipa!

LIPA. Why, Vassa Petrovna, I always—

VASSA. Don't forget who you are!

LIPA (*in despair*). Let me go, in God's name! I'll go into a convent—

VASSA. A convent? (*After a pause.*) I'll show you a convent.

LIPA (*crying*). I can't go on living— I'm frightened—

VASSA (*in a softer tone*). You're taken care of here. Dry your tears—come. If I let you go, you'll go to ruin. While here, if you behave to earn my gratitude, you won't find me ungenerous. Go now—and stop whimpering. Ask Mikhail to come in. (PAVEL *appears at the door.*) What is it, Pavel?

PAVEL. Just so.

VASSA. Always just so. What does it mean?

PAVEL. Just nothing.

VASSA (*looks at him in bewilderment*). God Almighty! How do you all get this way? Idlers, good-for-nothings—

PAVEL. What can I do? I don't know what to do with myself—my heart's like lead—

VASSA. If you can't manage the woman, put up with it—for a while—

PAVEL. How long a while? You're a cruel woman, Mother.

VASSA. I? H'm—

PAVEL. You'd use a son like a spade to dig earth with to get more money—

VASSA (*quietly*). Why don't you become a monk, Pavel?

PAVEL (*startled*). I? What for?

VASSA. What else can you do with yourself?

PAVEL (*frightened*). Are you serious, Mother?

VASSA. I am.

PAVEL (*in bitter resentment*). Oh, no—you won't put that over—How do you like that? Oh, no!

VASSA. Who are you talking to?

PAVEL. To you.

VASSA. Get out!

PAVEL (*going off*). I'm not afraid of you— Such gall!

VASSA comes down into her room, sits at her desk, and sorts out the papers, lifting them close to her eyes with shaking hands.

VASSA (*muttering to herself*). What have I been toiling for all these years? For whom?

She throws the papers back on the desk, removes her spectacles, and sits motionless, with a stern face, staring wearily into distance.

Enter MIKHAIL.

MIKHAIL (*peevishly*). Did you call me?

VASSA. How are you speaking to me?

MIKHAIL. How?

VASSA. Showing too much temper. Have patience, sir, I'm still the mistress here.

MIKHAIL (*dejectedly*). I can't think what I'm doing. My nerves. Semyon keeps laughing at me—

VASSA. Well, never mind. Did you know Prokhor had a lawyer call on him?

MIKHAIL. Yes, I know. That Lipa of yours—

VASSA. Yes, she muffed it.

MIKHAIL. We ought to throw a scare into her—

VASSA. She seems to have forgotten what fear is—

MIKHAIL. That's impossible. Killing a child is no joke.

VASSA. And it'd be dangerous for us, too. The child was by Semyon, after all.

MIKHAIL. That can't be proved. The child wasn't branded with the firm's seal. It was just a child. Now the mother's here, but the child is missing—

VASSA. I wish you'd talk to her—and be severe with her.

MIKHAIL. I will.

VASSA. Do that. It's easier for a man. Threaten first, show kindness afterward— Well, I had a talk with Prokhor.

MIKHAIL. Any results?

VASSA. Says he'll ruin us—

MIKHAIL. He can—

VASSA (*lowering her eyes*). Yes—that's what we've come to!

MIKHAIL (*quietly*). It requires serious measures.

VASSA (*without looking at him*). What's your opinion?

MIKHAIL. I have only one hope—he has a weak heart. Such people die suddenly—

VASSA. Nonsense. He'll outlive you and me.

MIKHAIL. God will decide that. He takes medicines more and more often now—I can tell by the apothecary's bills. Yakov, the doctor's helper, says they're dangerous medicines—

VASSA. Medicines can't be dangerous. Yakov drinks too much— He's lying—

MIKHAIL. There are two of them—one for the heart, the other— excuse my saying it—to give him strength to deal with the ladies—

VASSA (*smiling*). What do you know! Is it Spanish fly?

MIKHAIL. Something like it, only more dangerous.

VASSA. The old devil!

MIKHAIL. Yakov was worried— The drugs, he says, are opposed to each other and mustn't be used to excess. If you increase the dose—

VASSA. The drunk prattles away and you listen to him— So you'll talk to Lipa, then?

MIKHAIL. I will without fail. If he should die now—

VASSA (*with a laugh*). You sound as if you were going to poison him— Get hold of yourself!

MIKHAIL. God forbid! How can you? It never entered my mind—

VASSA. You'd better be more cautious—in what you say—

MIKHAIL (*gasping*). You frightened me—

VASSA. There's nothing to be afraid of—

MIKHAIL. What's more, I feel hurt—

VASSA. I didn't say anything to hurt your feelings. It's not in my

interest to hurt you. The only time I have peace of mind is when I talk to you—

MIKHAIL. Don't forget I've served you all my life—devotedly— I even gave my daughter, my only child, who after you has been—

VASSA. There, there, my friend. We still have a life ahead of us, thank God. Have patience. And don't blame me for Lyuda. I love her—I was against the marriage—

MIKHAIL (*explodes with pent-up rage*). It's him! I know, it's his doing! Every crook has his scheme. I can see through him. He was afraid to make a mistress of her when she was a girl, so he got her married to his nephew—I know!

VASSA (*in a low voice*). Don't put off the talk with Lipa—

MIKHAIL. Don't worry—I've sworn to myself!

VASSA. And be calmer yourself—

MIKHAIL. Who's excited?

VASSA. Well, well—run along. Don't forget about the will—

MIKHAIL *bows respectfully and kisses* VASSA's *hand. She kisses his brow in return and strokes his head twice. He goes off, drawing himself up like a soldier. After watching him out,* VASSA *resumes her seat at the desk and looks over some papers, muttering under her breath. Cautiously,* ANNA *enters. She gazes at her mother with an ironic expression, which quickly changes to one of tenderness and sadness.*

ANNA. Mother—

VASSA (*turning her head*). Anna! Anna dear!

ANNA. Alone, as in the old days—my gray-haired darling mother. How are you?

VASSA. I'm well, thank God. The way you came in—it was so nice. What about the telegram? I've been waiting for it all along—

ANNA. Not for me? How's Father?

VASSA (*looking into the dining room*). He's bad. Did anybody see you come in?

ANNA. Some young fellow opened the door for me and ran away—didn't even ask who I was.

VASSA. That was Mitka, from the office—an idiot! Well, I'm glad. Wait, I'll shut the door—we'll talk by ourselves—so I can tell you everything— Ah, an officer's wife! Look at you! (*She shuts the door and, visibly excited, draws* ANNA *down by the hand to sit beside her on the sofa.*) Well, Anna—

ANNA (*quietly*). So Father—

VASSA. Never leaves his bed. (*Striking a business note at once.*) We're in for trouble, Anna. Uncle wants to take his money out of the business—and who earned this money for him? By whose work did it grow? By Zakhar's and mine. The only thing Prokhor ever did was to run after women or open theaters— What does he need money for? He's alone—

ANNA (*frowning*). Just a minute—

VASSA. You listen to me! Semyon's under the thumb of his wife, a silly girl, and she's urging him to pull out of the business too. Pavel is a miserable little man— His wife—you know her—he married Lyudmila— She's no good for him and there's a suspicion she's playing around with other men. I don't believe it—she's too fastidious. I can't understand a thing, Anna. That's why I asked you to come. You're from outside—maybe you'll have some idea what might be done—at least there'll be less mischief—

ANNA (*attentively*). So? We're on the verge of ruin?

VASSA. The whole business is falling apart. Thirty years of work going up in smoke— They've been hard years, with big losses. We've many heirs, but no workers to look after the business. What have Father and I toiled for? For whom? Who will redeem our sins? We were years building up, now it's coming down in days—it seems unfair— It's unbearable.

ANNA. Has Father made his will?

VASSA (*brought up short, after a pause*). Will?— I don't know.

ANNA (*doubtfully*). You don't know? You?

VASSA. He must have made it— Only think what a business is going to pieces—

ANNA. Yes—

VASSA. Now then. You have a talk with your brothers—they don't believe me, these sons of mine. They think I want to get everything into my own hands. But you, Anna, they'll have to believe. You're disinterested. Your father gave you your share of the fortune when he drove you out—

ANNA (*rising*). My share? He tossed me ten thousand as if I were a beggar. Is that all I'm entitled to?

VASSA (*with a smile*). There's a receipt from you—saying you received your share in full.

ANNA. What's a receipt? Make me a gift of it, Mother.

VASSA (*as if joking*). For what services, my dear lady?

ANNA (*reflectively*). Services? Well, first let me get everything straight in my mind—

VASSA (*watching* ANNA). Get it all straight, daughter, get it straight. How have you been making out?

ANNA (*reluctantly*). So-so.

VASSA. How's your husband?

ANNA. He was promoted to a lieutenant colonel after the summer maneuvers—given a battalion—

VASSA. Does he drink?

ANNA. What officer doesn't? He's ill. Soon I'll probably be a widow.

VASSA (*with a smile, quietly*). So your love is a thing of the past, is it? (ANNA *smiles silently.*) There you are. And how you burned then! I told you—

ANNA. We won't talk about that, Mother.

VASSA (*scrutinizing her*). You speak firmly—sit boldly, with your legs crossed—and smoke too.

ANNA. Yes, I smoke.

VASSA. Doesn't seem to become a lady.

ANNA. It becomes me.

VASSA. You're dressed like a woman of quality.

ANNA. I have some talent for that.

VASSA. How are the children?

ANNA (*proudly*). My children are all well and happy—

VASSA. Your first one didn't live long.

ANNA. No— He was a weak, sickly child—

VASSA (*smiling*). I see. The first one was sickly—and those after, thanks to God, all came healthy—from a sick husband—

ANNA (*blushes, glances at her mother, and laughs quietly*). You are clever, Mother.

VASSA (*pleased*). Well, I'll call your brothers—

ANNA. Did they know I was coming?

VASSA (*moving toward the door*). Why should they?

VASSA *opens the door.* PAVEL, *taken by surprise eavesdropping, is seen jumping away and stumbling over a chair.* VASSA *looks at him. Embarrassed, he rubs his knee.*

PAVEL (*in a low voice*). I couldn't hear anything anyway—

VASSA. You couldn't? What a shame!

PAVEL (*bitterly*). Am I one of the family? I was told a lady had arrived with baggage—

VASSA. You could have knocked on the door, and I'd have opened it to you.

ANNA (*coming forward*). Hello, Pavel!

PAVEL (*to his mother*). I'll be hanged! I never thought it was her. How are you, Anna?

VASSA. Ask him why he eavesdrops on his mother, and he won't be able to answer—he doesn't know himself. (*Goes into the dining room.*)

PAVEL. Bosh! Who eavesdropped?

ANNA (*smiling*). Are you glad to see me?

PAVEL. Of course. You're getting into a real madhouse.

ANNA (*in an undertone, after a glance into the dining room*). Mother is the same as she used to be?

PAVEL. Worse. She wants to grab everything.

ANNA. But she already has everything in her hands—

PAVEL. That won't be so when Father dies! Nothing doing. We're no longer children—I'm twenty-four and Semyon's three years older—

ANNA. Are you good friends?

PAVEL. It varies. Semyon is a bit of a fool—

ANNA. And your wives?

PAVEL. His wife is a sly one. Fat, but sly. You've gotten quite beauti-

ful. And you dress differently—I like it. Here everybody is dressed in black and stripes, as though it were a hospital.

ANNA. You married Lyuda?

PAVEL. That's right. Furthermore, there isn't anything for a person to do here. I began buying old icons from the Old Believers, across the river. Mother nagged me to death: You don't pray to God, says she, but you spend money like water. She doesn't understand that in that business you can make ten rubles on every ruble you spend. The most profitable line is antiques. A dealer in town bought six plates for nine rubles and sold them for three hundred and twenty—so you see! And here we busy ourselves with bricks, tiles, wood, peat— That devil's coming! Ah! *Enter* PROKHOR.

PROKHOR. Great Scott! What an elegant lady! (*Arms half raised, he stands observing his niece, clicking his tongue with satisfaction.*) Bravo! Well, give me a kiss!

ANNA. You mustn't embarrass me, Uncle.

PROKHOR. Embarrass you? H'm—one doesn't get embarrassed with such eyes—you don't really mean it! *Enter* SEMYON *and* NATALYA.

ANNA. Ah, Semyon! Isn't he fat!

SEMYON (*pleased to see* ANNA). Anna! This is wonderful. God, I'm so glad, honest— How many years is it since we last saw each other?

ANNA. You'd better introduce me to your wife.

SEMYON. Certainly. Natalya—this is Anna. Remember, I told you how she used to beat me up?

PROKHOR. Not enough.

ANNA (*to* NATALYA). I'm very glad to meet you— Let's be friends.

NATALYA. Yes, ma'am!

PROKHOR. Boom!

SEMYON. Well, she's a quiet girl. She's an Old Believer, was baptized in a pot—

PROKHOR. It must have been extra big.

ANNA (*to* PAVEL). Where's Lyudmila?

PAVEL (*taken by surprise*). I don't know— (SEMYON *chuckles. The others are silent for a second.*) She's asleep.

SEMYON. You know her.

ANNA. She used to be pretty.

PROKHOR. Ha! You should see her now. A regular demon!

SEMYON. What praise!

PAVEL. He said that to spite me. They all laugh at me—

NATALYA. Don't take it that way!

PAVEL. They're driving me to my grave, Anna.

ANNA. Oh, how frightful!

She puts her arm around him and leads him to a corner, saying something to him as she does so. He mumbles in reply and waves his hands.

PROKHOR (*to* SEMYON). A fine-looking woman, your sister, isn't she?

SEMYON. I'll say she is—
NATALYA. Only her eyes are too bright—
SEMYON. She resembles Mother—
PROKHOR. What a figure! A *grande dame!*
SEMYON. Oh, what a terror she was! How she used to beat me!
NATALYA. It's not nice of Lyudmila not to come in. It's disrespectful to Anna Zakharovna— *Enter* MIKHAIL.
MIKHAIL. Permit me to congratulate you, Anna Zakharovna, on your returning to your own roof—
NATALYA (*in a low voice*). Her roof? How's that?
MIKHAIL. Which makes me extremely happy—
ANNA. You haven't aged at all, Uncle Mikhail—good for you! I'm glad to see you—
MIKHAIL. So am I—most heartily.
SEMYON (*to* NATALYA). How do you like her?
NATALYA. She's all right. Only sort of spotty—
SEMYON. Why, she's dressed in one color, you stupid!
NATALYA. I see that. It's just my impression—
PROKHOR. You've got spots before the eyes—
Enter LYUDMILA, *looking disheveled and sleepy, yet beautiful.*
LYUDMILA (*rushing up to* ANNA). Anna darling!
ANNA (*embracing her*). Lyuda—
LYUDMILA. Oh, I'm so glad, Anna—
ANNA. You look—
LYUDMILA. You're like a ray of sunshine—
PAVEL. There she goes whining—
VASSA *appears in the doorway.*
VASSA. Anna! Come see your father.
PROKHOR. Is he worse?
PAVEL. Wait with your crowing—you may be too early—
PROKHOR. Am I asking you, cripple?
PAVEL *darts behind the table and sticks out his tongue at* PROKHOR.
LYUDMILA (*laughing through tears*). Look, Father.
PROKHOR (*advancing toward* PAVEL). I'll box your ears, Pavel!
PAVEL. You touch me—
MIKHAIL (*to* LYUDMILA). You'd better get out—
SEMYON (*excitedly*). Block his way with a chair, Uncle! Duck under the table, Pavel!

CURTAIN

ACT II

The dining room. LYUDMILA *is standing in front of the fireplace.* ANNA *is walking up and down the room, a cigarette in her hand. The room is in semi-darkness. It is evening.*

ANNA. It's a pity you didn't write to me—

LYUDMILA. Well—I didn't even know your address.

ANNA. If you had wanted to—

LYUDMILA. I'm being watched—by my husband, my father— And what could I write to you about? What are you interested in?

ANNA. Yourself—everybody—

LYUDMILA. I don't understand anything here— In the past two years I've grown stupid and bitter—

ANNA. Why did you marry Pavel?

LYUDMILA. I had to.

ANNA. You had to?

LYUDMILA. Yes.

ANNA. How did you let it happen? You're so cautious—

LYUDMILA. It was an odd, abnormal time. Disorders, strikes everywhere—as if everybody was preparing for a holiday. The preparations went on and on, but the holiday never came. I happened to meet a fellow—he was almost a boy—pock-marked too, but awfully handsome—

ANNA. Where is he?

LYUDMILA. I don't know. He's disappeared.

ANNA. Does Pavel know about him?

LYUDMILA. No. Nobody knows—except Uncle—

ANNA. But how did you manage—

LYUDMILA. I managed. Uncle Prokhor taught me— He was awfully nice—that pock-marked boy—extraordinarily kind and pleasant—with everybody—

ANNA. And what sort of a man is Uncle Prokhor?

LYUDMILA. Oh, just a businessman who likes a good time. He's pleasant too. He'll be nice to you, but later you have to pay it back—with interest. (*Changing her tone.*) Well, God will be his judge. I don't want to speak ill of him. After all, he did me a good turn once. And we're not beggars—we have to remember the good services done to us—don't we, Anna?

ANNA (*indifferently*). Yes—of course—

LYUDMILA (*smiling*). The only one here that's close to me is your mother. Strange—I hardly ever speak to her. And she doesn't ask me about anything either—except sometimes she may take me to task on account of Pavel. But I know in my heart she's the only one who feels sorry for me and loves me. Without her I don't know what I might not have done!

ANNA (*frowning*). Is that so?

LYUDMILA (*cheerfully*). Well, as soon as spring comes I'll be working with her in the garden. Ah, what a joy it is, Anna, when you help the earth deck itself out with flowers. At sunrise Mother will knock on my door and say in such an angry voice, "You there, get up!" And we'll both go out in silence and work almost the whole day, till sunset.

You wouldn't recognize the garden if it were summer now. It's grown so rich, so beautiful. Last spring we bought more than a hundred rubles' worth of flower seeds alone. And you should see our trees—plum, apple, cherry. I've learned to make grafts. I even do them for the peasants in the village—I've become a regular gardener. Mother bought me a book on horticulture. Study, she said, it's honest work. Seeing our successes in the garden and the truck garden, peasants have been sending their wives here to ask for seeds or graftings—they have great respect for me now. Life is a joy here during the spring, summer, and autumn. But winter is a hard time for both me and Mother. The house seems to be too crowded. We say nothing, but we both know what's in our minds— Why do you look so listless?

ANNA. I don't know—I feel sad somehow— You're so beautiful, so young—

LYUDMILA. Just you see me when I begin work this spring. Ah, our garden! As you enter it in the morning when it's sprinkled with dewdrops and glittering in the sun, you feel as if you've stepped into a church. You swoon, you grow faint, and you begin to sing as if you were drunk! The moment I stop singing, Mother shouts to me, "Go on, sing!" And somewhere above the shrubs I catch sight of her face, a kind, caressing, motherly face.

ANNA (*in a low voice, doubtfully*). Kind? Caressing?

LYUDMILA. That's what I said. Why? Do you remember how we too used to play in that garden? *Enter* PAVEL.

PAVEL. What are you gossiping about? (*Lights the candles in the chandelier.*)

LYUDMILA. What's that for?

PAVEL. So I may admire your beauty!

LYUDMILA. Put them out.

PAVEL. I won't.

LYUDMILA. Cripple!

PAVEL. That's the sort of harpy they've tied me to for life, Anna!

LYUDMILA. You lie! You begged me on your bended knees, like a beggar, to marry you—

ANNA. Stop it.

LYUDMILA. You see, he can't manage me, so he does all sorts of nasty things to annoy me. I was given a Siberian cat as a gift—he poisoned him.

PAVEL. He was always scratching me. And anyway, I didn't poison him—he died of overeating—

LYUDMILA (*jumping to her feet*). Shut up, you baboon! I hate the sight of you— (*Goes off quickly.*)

PAVEL (*in a low voice*). You've run away, ah? You hate the sight of me?

ANNA. What do you intend to do, Pavel?

PAVEL (*with a grin*). Nothing. I suffer, let her suffer too. (*Suddenly*

with sincerity and fervor.) For God's sake Anna, help me. I'll give you anything you like—money, if you need that, when father dies! Christ, I'll give you anything—anything!

ANNA (*thinking it over*). What can I do?

PAVEL. You married for love. Teach her to love me—do that! If you only knew how I love her! Often when she's asleep I kneel beside her bed and whisper, "Lyuda, my darling, no one will ever love you as I do!" And I keep at it all through the night till daybreak. "Everybody has something, but I'm a monstrosity. I have nobody to live for but you," I say to her, and she goes on sleeping. Help me, Anna!

ANNA (*hurriedly*). Calm yourself—somebody's coming.

PAVEL. I don't care. Let 'em all come. They all know about it.

Enter NATALYA.

NATALYA. Pavel, Mother's calling you. (*Looks at the two suspiciously.*) Hurry up, she's cross.

PAVEL (*going off*). She's always cross.

NATALYA (*following him*). You beat up an office boy—

PAVEL. What of it? You have to beat them—

ANNA (*to* NATALYA). Natalya, wait a minute.

NATALYA (*returning*). Yes, Anna.

ANNA. Whew! I feel as if he's beaten me.

NATALYA. Was he complaining about his wife?

ANNA. You seem to get on well with him.

NATALYA. I'm the same with everybody.

ANNA. Don't you find it rather dull?

NATALYA. Why?

ANNA. You're so young—you have no amusements here—

NATALYA. I've a husband.

ANNA (*smiling*). Is that enough?

NATALYA. He does all he can to keep me from getting bored—makes me laugh and everything. Besides, this isn't a time when one feels much like laughing—

ANNA (*her interest aroused*). It isn't?

NATALYA (*with conviction*). Certainly not. It's impossible for people to live now as they did before. Now one ought to move to town—and everything should be different—

ANNA (*seriously*). How do you mean?

NATALYA. I can't explain it yet—I think about it a lot, but I don't know myself. But we ought to live in fortified towns protected by policemen and troops— (*Warming up.*) After those terrible years, nice people are growing more and more scarce, sister Anna. They've all begun thinking and talking to one another in secret. Certain ones are going from place to place—a man came here a while ago and tried to convince everybody that all work is sin, and one shouldn't do anything! It frightened me at the time—just imagine what it'll be like if they all stop work again—

ANNA. You do have strange ideas.

NATALYA. My child is sick so I don't sleep much, and at night I have a chance to think about things. But I'm still very young and nobody listens to me. You do, and I thank you for that. It pleases me very much. *Enter* PROKHOR, *looking aggrieved.*

PROKHOR. Where's Vassa?

ANNA. I don't know.

NATALYA. She's gone to the factory.

PROKHOR. The she-devil!

ANNA. Where have you been to get yourself in such a state?

PROKHOR. You mean so dirty? That's the pigeon house. The filthy scum! For three months I've been asking them to repair the ladder. They ignore it. It's deliberate, Anna, make no mistake about it. If ever I drop down into the cellar and break my neck, you can take it from me, it will have been arranged, it'll be some of Pavel's monkey-shines.

ANNA. Oh, Uncle, how can you say such things?

PROKHOR. I know what I'm saying—if you don't. The other day I was sitting up in the pigeon house, when somebody opened the cellar-trap quietly, moved the ladder to the very edge, and shut the door leading to the backyard. It was dark. The floor over the cellar was slippery. It was a miracle I didn't fall through. What are you to make out of that? Whose criminal doings were those?

NATALYA. If Pavel is driven too far, he can commit a great sin. I've been telling Lyudmila that—

PROKHOR. You see? Even Balaam's ass speaketh likewise—

NATALYA. You have no occasion to compare me to an ass—

PROKHOR. There, there! Don't you remember who spoke through the ass's mouth?

NATALYA. That makes no difference— I'm a merchant's daughter.

ANNA. You shouldn't encourage Uncle in his hostile thoughts, Natalya.

NATALYA. One musn't conceal terrible thoughts. You know yourself, people stricken with some misfortune are always very spiteful—

PROKHOR (*jovially*). How do you like that? Isn't she a dove with a serpent's brain?

NATALYA (*hurt*). My brain is very ordinary, if you please—it's a very human brain— (*She goes off.*)

ANNA. Oh, Uncle—why do you treat her like that?

PROKHOR. Never mind, she'll swallow it. I dislike this dark little soul in a dark dress. (*Laughing.*) You know, I once heard her tell her husband her dream of a future life. (*Imitating* NATALYA.) "I'm lying, dear, in a mauve velvet dressing gown with only a lace chemise underneath—or I may be just sitting on such a quelque chose"—

ANNA (*smiling*). It must've been chaise longue.

PROKHOR. It's all the same. (*Again copying* NATALYA.) "And

various people call on me—the Chief of Police, the Mayor, the judges —in short, the whole town! And as they look at me, everybody's jealous of you— That Zheleznov is a lucky dog! By God, what a wife he has! And I just move my foot or expose my shoulder a little—let 'em gnash their teeth in envy!" (*Laughs.*) A fine picture, isn't it? And that fool Semyon roars with laughter—

ANNA (*seriously*). She's a strange woman. I don't understand her. You'd think she was rather witless—

PROKHOR. Devil knows what she is. You should see her roll her eyes sometimes—ah, I'm sick and tired of the whole damn lot!

ANNA. Why do you live with them?

PROKHOR. Boom! What a question! Why, all my money is tied up here—thanks to Zakhar. Wait till I pull it out—then good-by to all my swindling relatives.

ANNA. Where will you go?

PROKHOR. To Moscow—to the capital! (*Bending over her, mysteriously.*) An unhappy love affair of mine has borne fruit. A fine fruit is ripening there, Anna.

ANNA. Your child?

PROKHOR. Boom! He's a student already—a delightful scamp!

ANNA. And the mother?

PROKHOR (*after a pause*). She's dead—I'm sorry to say. (*Recovering his jovial mood.*) He calls me an unexpected father—the gay devil! And doesn't ask for anything. Can you beat it? He's not of our blood, no. The rascal drinks a bit too much— And he's a theater fan, knows all the actresses— He studies in the mythological—

ANNA. Philological.

PROKHOR. No, I was right. There is such a science—mythology. He described it all to me in full detail, and I myself have read poems about a Greek war—the Iliad—and recently about Ulysses. Now, there was a rogue for you, that Ulysses. Such a marvelous liar! He made believe that he went right down to hell—you understand?— and that life in hell was not at all terrible, just deadly dull— That son of mine, Pyotr, is also a fine liar! *Enter* VASSA.

VASSA. Peace be to your discourse. Who made Natalya lose her temper?

ANNA. Natalya?

VASSA. Yes. She's standing in the middle of the drawing room tearing the tassels off her shawl. She's turned blue in the face. (*To* PROKHOR.) Your pigeon man is asking for you outside.

PROKHOR (*walking about the room*). He can wait.

ANNA (*with her eyes and cautious gestures urges her mother to leave the room.* VASSA *gazes at her with an air of distrust*). Has Semyon returned from town?

VASSA. I don't know. I need him for something too. I'd better go see. (*Goes off.*)

PROKHOR. Let's have a game of cards. We'll call Lyudmila, Natalya—

ANNA. We might just as well. So you've decided to withdraw from the business?

PROKHOR. That I will. I'm getting too old—and what kind of a business is it anyway? You see, I'm beginning to feel scared. In the old days I walked through the village and felt I was a master. Today, although they bow low to me as before, I know they do it only to hide the spite in their eyes— Then the authorities too—there are too many of them—make me feel a bit embarrassed. No, this is no life. It's like that Greek Iliad—everybody's trying to knock the other fellow on the head. Besides, I'm no great shakes as a businessman, never was—and what do I want with a business now?

Enter SEMYON.

SEMYON. Have you been asking for me?

ANNA. Mother was.

SEMYON. She says it was you. So nobody wants me? That's fine.

PROKHOR. Boom! I'll go and fetch Lyudmila. Want a game of cards, Semyon?

SEMYON. I don't mind. Lord, it's good to live in town. Stone houses —everything looks solid, bright, and clean. And the people are different—talk about everything, know everything. There's the city council, politics—interesting happenings—

PROKHOR (*as he goes off*). Pretty ladies—

SEMYON. Go away—skirt chaser!

ANNA. Do you seriously think that he and Lyudmila—that he plays around with her?

SEMYON (*looking pleased*). Plays around? Ha! I was waiting to hear how you'd put it. You did all right! That's what the city does—it teaches you everything. Of course, Uncle plays around with her—for all he's worth! I heard him myself once giving her some advice—I was almost bowled over, I was so shocked—

ANNA. What sort of advice?

SEMYON. I can't tell you that—it's too embarrassing.

ANNA. I'm a married woman.

SEMYON. That makes no difference. Besides, I didn't quite catch it —it was something about children—how to keep them from being born. Ah, he's not worth talking about. He's a playboy—the business leaves him cold—

ANNA. And you—does it leave you cold?

SEMYON. Me? Well, there's not much joy in tiles and bricks— And the people around here, too, look sullen now—guards everywhere—strict orders—drunkenness—fights—you get fed up. As soon as Father dies I'll move to town—you see yourself in quite a different light when you have your own kind of people all around you—

ANNA. And who's going to run the business?

SEMYON. The business? It should be scaled down—there's no profit in cutting peat. And what's left, let Mother and Mikhail putter around with it. As for me, I'll open a jewelry store in town—yes, right on the main street—with a sign "Semyon Zheleznov—Jewelry"—what a soft sound that word has—jewelry! I'll have my apartment over the store—buy a harmonium—play it—whew! LYUDMILA *bursts in.*

LYUDMILA. Go make them stop fighting, Anna.

SEMYON (*alarmed*). Who's fighting?

LYUDMILA. Uncle Prokhor's beating Pavel.

SEMYON. There you are! Well, why don't you go, Anna?

ANNA. I'm a woman. I might get hit! You go.

SEMYON (*going off*). What can I do? I'm no policeman—

LYUDMILA. My God, what a life, what a life!

ANNA. Never mind, Lyuda.

LYUDMILA. It'd be better if Uncle killed Pavel—he's so pitiable—so repulsive!

ANNA. What started them off?

LYUDMILA. Pavel said he wouldn't let me play cards. I laughed and he pushed me and began to rave. Then Uncle grabbed him by the hair—

ANNA (*calmly*). Peasants!

LYUDMILA. It disgusts me.

ANNA. This is certainly no life for you.

LYUDMILA. One has to pay a lot for happiness, however little you get. (*Reflectively.*) Still, when I think of that boy, I feel easier. It's such a fine feeling, Anna, when a man cries for joy in front of you—He's such a dear, such a lovable creature then— Have you ever felt like that?

ANNA (*putting her arms around* LYUDMILA). Yes, I have. You darling—

LYUDMILA. At such a moment you feel like the richest queen in the world—don't you? And you care so little for everything else, you're willing to face death if necessary. *Enter* VASSA.

VASSA. What was that noise I heard?

LYUDMILA (*rushing over to* VASSA). Oh, Mother, please do something!

VASSA. Well, what have you been up to?

LYUDMILA. Nothing. It's Pavel and Uncle—they've been fighting—

VASSA. Again. I've asked you, Lyuda—

LYUDMILA. I can't help it. You know everything—you understand it—I just can't be pleasant to him. You've said yourself, one can't deceive a man—

VASSA. Well, run along— Talk to them—those two fools—

LYUDMILA (*going off*). What good can I do?

ANNA. Does this happen often here?

VASSA (*sitting down by the fireplace*). It's been going on for two or

three years. At times it gets me so I feel I could take them all and—I'm sorry for Pavel—terribly sorry, Anna.

ANNA. It's just as hard on Lyudmila.

VASSA. On her? She'll stand it.

ANNA. What *is* going on between her and Uncle Prokhor?

VASSA. Prokhor's a scoundrel. He got to know the girl's secret and has been taking advantage of it. The dirty blackmailer!

ANNA (*quietly*). Look, when you go to bed, I'll come in to see you.

VASSA (*on her guard*). Why? What for?

ANNA. We have to talk things over. They've been unburdening their hearts here.

VASSA. Prokhor?

ANNA. He too. You know he has a son.

VASSA. More than one, I'm sure. Well?

ANNA. One of them he intends to adopt.

VASSA (*rising*). Are you making this up to frighten me?

ANNA. That's what he says.

VASSA. Well, that's the end. What have we worked for—prided ourselves on? No, we can't permit that—not that.

ANNA. Semyon wants to move into town.

VASSA. I see. What next?

ANNA. And Pavel too.

VASSA (*sharply*). Be still. I'll find a place for him. (*Lowering her voice.*) And where am I to go? Where will they pack me off to?

ANNA. Let me finish—

VASSA. Quiet. That's enough.

PROKHOR, SEMYON *and* NATALYA *enter, excited.*

SEMYON. Stop it, Natalya.

PROKHOR. Won't anybody gag this idiot?

NATALYA. Who else can speak the truth here, if I don't?

SEMYON. Come to your senses, Natalya. What has that got to do with you? Wipe your hands of it!

VASSA. What's all this rumpus about?

PROKHOR. Your dear daughter-in-law has gone raving mad—that's what!

NATALYA (*to* PROKHOR). It's you who've made Pavel a wild man—

PROKHOR. Stop her, Semyon, you fathead!

ANNA. Look, Uncle, you're the most intelligent man here.

PROKHOR. Me? They made me lose my senses long ago. You know that little rat tried to plunge a knife into me— How do you like that?

Enter LYUDMILA. *She takes a seat in a corner and gazes at the others without moving.*

NATALYA. You're to blame for everything—

VASSA. Semyon, where's your authority over your wife?

SEMYON. Enough of that, Mother. You're always talking about authority, but you don't let anybody take orders from me!

NATALYA. You won't stop me. I'll tell everything. It was you who ruined Lyudmila.

PROKHOR. You little fool! Why, she was ruined before she got married— (*Noticing* LYUDMILA.) How do you like that, Anna?

LYUDMILA. Go on, tell them what I did before I got married.

VASSA (*severely, in a low voice*). Lyuda! Quiet— Are you mad?

PROKHOR. Go to blazes, all of you!

LYUDMILA. You've lifted your hand, so you'd better strike.

PROKHOR (*going off*). Wait! I'll curb your tongues one day!

LYUDMILA. Got cold feet—ha!

VASSA. Be quiet, I tell you!

LYUDMILA. It makes no difference, Mother! Now Pavel will know it —and so will everybody.

SEMYON (*to* NATALYA). Let's go—before we get mixed up in something else.

LYUDMILA. I bet Natalya won't keep her mouth shut.

NATALYA. What do *you* think? I'm not one to hush up lies.

SEMYON. Come on. Forget about it. There's nothing to it. Whew! (*He and* NATALYA *go off.*)

LYUDMILA. Oh, I'd leave my skin behind, if I could only get out of here!

VASSA. There, Anna—see? Nobody feels bound to anything. Grab and run away, that's all they want.

LYUDMILA. I've nothing to grab. I don't want anything. All I ask is leave me my life! *Enter* PAVEL, *his head bandaged.*

PAVEL. I want some money, Mother.

VASSA. Here's another one.

LYUDMILA (*half crying, half laughing*). What a beautiful sight, dear heaven!

PAVEL (*quietly*). Are you a mother to me? Tell her, Anna, to let me go—

VASSA (*in a strange tone*). I'll find a place for you, Pavel, soon.

ANNA. My advice to you, Mother, is to let him go. Uncle is capable of God knows what—

PAVEL. I'm not afraid of him.

ANNA. You see he gave Pavel a beating—

PAVEL. He's a liar!

ANNA. Pavel is weak—but when roused, even a weak man can—

VASSA (*looking at* ANNA *intently*). Stop it.

LYUDMILA. You talk, Anna, as if you were prompting him—

VASSA. Leave the room, Lyudmila. You, too, Pavel. I'll see you later. (*The two go off.* VASSA *walks the length of the room, then stops before* ANNA.) What are you up to?

ANNA (*guilelessly*). I? Why?

VASSA. Don't put on. I see through it. (*Paces again.*) Pavel's my son —have you forgotten that?

ANNA (*embarrassed*). I don't know what you mean—

VASSA. It's a lie. You're much too simple. You think, if your brother gets rid of your uncle—

ANNA. How can you, Mother? Really!

VASSA. Then you'll benefit by it?

ANNA. Why, it never even entered—

VASSA (*glumly*). No, you're not very clever, no. Who's there?

Enter MIKHAIL.

MIKHAIL. Good evening.

VASSA. Well, how is he?

MIKHAIL. Not good. Has great difficulty in breathing—

VASSA. Would that God would soon take him to Himself! It's the fifth week he's been gasping for breath. His eyes are clear—he apparently understands everything. If only he'd stop suffering—

MIKHAIL. Seems he hasn't got long to go now.

VASSA (*leaving the room*). You wait for me here.

ANNA. Things are getting pretty bad in this household, Mikhail Vassilyevich.

MIKHAIL. They couldn't be worse. Everything's in confusion, everything.

ANNA. Then where will it all end?

MIKHAIL. I can't make out—

ANNA. It's hard on Mother. And it seems Uncle Prokhor has no desire to help her.

MIKHAIL (*dejectedly*). He? Help her?

ANNA. Why are you so surprised?

MIKHAIL (*ironically*). Just so.

ANNA. Come, tell me why.

MIKHAIL. The reason for my surprise is simple. As your father, Zakhar Ivanovich, used to say, a Russian often mistakes his stupidity for his conscience— (*Enter* LIPA.) What do you want?

LIPA. Your uncle is asking you to come to his room, Anna Zakharovna—

ANNA. Do you know why he wants me?

LIPA. His heart's troubling him.

ANNA (*to* MIKHAIL). What's this?

MIKHAIL (*reassuringly*). That happens to him from time to time.

LIPA. He gasps—

MIKHAIL (*looking at* LIPA). That's right—he gasps—Lipa has often seen him like that— (ANNA *hurries out.* MIKHAIL *stops* LIPA *with a movement of his hand.*) Well?

LIPA. What?

MIKHAIL. Don't you know?

LIPA. I won't do it.

MIKHAIL. Why?

LIPA. I can't. I'm afraid.

MIKHAIL. Think it's a sin?

LIPA. Isn't it? He's a human being.

MIKHAIL. So. It's no sin to strangle one's own child, but it's a sin when it comes to a stranger?

LIPA (*bitterly*). The child! You're reminding me of that? But I did it out of pity for it—

MIKHAIL (*in a softer tone*). Look out, Prokhor knows all about it—

LIPA. So do you. Am I to poison you too?

MIKHAIL. What are you shouting for? Doing it on purpose? Watch out, my friend! I also can let a word or two slip off my tongue—(*Moving closer to her.*) Come, don't be obstinate. Go into his room. You can't have a better opportunity. All you have to do is pour a big dose from both bottles and give it to him. Don't you see? That's not poison, it's medicine. After that you're free to go anywhere you like. Remember, if you don't sin, you can't repent, and if you can't repent, you can't save your soul. Now run along. You want to be free, don't you? Well, you'll be your own mistress—you'll receive a fine reward. You're young, you have a life to live. And you can't live unless you've sinned—you can't, Lipa, take my word for it. Many have tried and failed. (LIPA *goes off, cowed.* MIKHAIL *returns, mumbling to himself.*) Ha! Putting on an act like that! Trash like her! Humbug!

PAVEL *pops his head in.*

PAVEL. Where's Mother?

MIKHAIL. She's gone to your father.

PAVEL. Who were you talking to?

MIKHAIL. Myself.

PAVEL. A fine companion. Look out, he'll swindle you.

MIKHAIL. Thanks for the warning. I accept it as a reward for my service to you.

PAVEL. Accept it any way you like—as alms, if you want.

He disappears. MIKHAIL *shakes his fist after him and paces the room, holding his hands behind his back and snapping his fingers.*

VASSA, SEMYON *and* NATALYA *enter.*

VASSA (*to* MIKHAIL, *gloomily*). Our dear master is nearing his end, it seems—

MIKHAIL (*lowering his head*). And Prokhor Ivanovich has a heart attack again—

VASSA (*to her children*). You two— Do you have to keep walking around?

SEMYON. You're walking around, aren't you?

VASSA. That's right—talk back! Send for Father Yegor— And you, Natalya—do you want anything?

SEMYON (*going off*). Natalya—whew!

VASSA. What was that he said?

NATALYA. Something—I don't know what.

VASSA. You don't. You'd better go to your room.

NATALYA. I'm scared to stay there.

VASSA. What?

NATALYA. I'm scared—I can hear his death rattle—

VASSA. Run along, run along. There's nothing to be scared of. We're all doomed to die—I'm older than you, and I'm not afraid of death—

NATALYA *goes off slowly, drawing her shawl more tightly around her shoulders.*

Scared! You're not afraid to eat bread— (*To* MIKHAIL.) You say Prokhor is having a heart attack?

MIKHAIL (*quietly*). Yes— (*With a start.*) What's that?

ANNA *bursts in.*

ANNA (*in a frightened whisper*). Listen—Lipa's poisoned Uncle.

VASSA. Is he dead? Well, Mikhail—

ANNA. I don't know—not yet—

MIKHAIL (*rushing about*). We must call the police—yes, we must call the police—

VASSA. Wait—where are you going? Keep still, Anna.

ANNA. She's in there screaming—

VASSA. Bring her here, Mikhail—

ANNA. We must call the doctor—

VASSA (*sternly, in a low voice*). Wait, I tell you. (LIPA *runs in and dashes over to* ANNA.) What have you done, you godless woman?

LIPA (*rushing to* VASSA). It's he who did it—it's all his doing—

VASSA. Be quiet! Haven't you ever given him his medicine before? Don't you know the dose?

LIPA. Let me go! For God's sake, let me go!

VASSA. Don't you know people are thrown in jail for such mistakes? How could you make such a mistake?

LIPA (*incapable of understanding anything*). What's going to happen? Oh, what will happen to me?

MIKHAIL. Oh, the idiot! Let me talk to her—

VASSA (*pushing* LIPA *into her room*). Stay there, and keep quiet. (*To* ANNA.) And what's the matter with you? Eh? Why are you trembling? A mistake happened—the girl gave the wrong medicine—that can happen anywhere, can't it? The master of the house is dying, everybody's rushing about, the girl is dead tired—

ANNA (*quietly*). I understand—

VASSA. There's nothing for you to understand! This is a matter that doesn't concern you. Now then, go to him, he needs help—

NATALYA *rushes in.*

NATALYA. Come quick! Uncle Prokhor—

ANNA (*involuntarily*). Is dead?

NATALYA (*recoiling*). Oh, no! Why?

VASSA (*regarding* NATALYA). You do say strange things, Anna. Why

should he die? He's had two heart attacks this winter, but he got over them.

NATALYA. God, I was so frightened. He slid off the bed—and now he's lying there twitching and hiccuping—

VASSA. Hiccuping! Simply terrible, isn't it? I also hiccup sometimes after dinner, but that doesn't frighten anybody. Go to him, both of you.

NATALYA. Come along, sister.

Casting frightened glances at her mother, ANNA *follows* NATALYA *out of the room.* VASSA *goes into her own room, walks up to* LIPA, *sitting sunk in a torpor, and shakes her.*

VASSA. Wake up, you devil! He's alive, you hear me? Alive! Damn your hide! Get out of my sight!

MIKHAIL (*to* LIPA). That mistake will cost you plenty—

VASSA. Leave her alone!

LIPA (*going down on her knees*). Vassa Petrovna! I did it deliberately— He told me how—honest! Have pity on me!

VASSA. Go to your room—go! Do you hear?

LIPA (*rising*). I'm not to blame—Oh, Lord!

She goes off unsteadily. VASSA *and* MIKHAIL *regard each other.* MIKHAIL *bows his head guiltily.*

VASSA. Fool!

MIKHAIL. It wasn't true, it seems—

VASSA. Your doctor's helper is a fool too!

MIKHAIL. That's why I say—something must be wrong there—

VASSA. I'm a good one, too—relying on you. Well, what are we going to do now? Come here. We'll talk it over thoroughly. (*Proceeds into her room.*) The first thing is Lipa—keep an eye on her! So she doesn't blab it out. Understand?

CURTAIN

ACT III

The dining room. The doors are closed. VASSA, *in mourning, is sitting before the fireplace.* ANNA *is walking about the room, smoking.* SEMYON *is seated at the table.*

SEMYON (*yawning*). It's time we had some tea.

VASSA. It's forty minutes too early.

SEMYON. Forty minutes be hanged. Whose life is it? My own. If I want to, I can cross out forty minutes or a whole hour—even a month. (*He puts his feet on a chair.*)

VASSA. Having fits, my man?

SEMYON. I'm bored. My wife doesn't feel well—I mustn't play cards. My blood has almost stopped running, honest to God!

VASSA. It's not forty days yet since Father's death, and you—h'm!—want to play cards—

SEMYON. Forty days, forty minutes—a jolly life, if you ask me! On top of that Natalya's breakdown—

VASSA. Nerves! I'm forty-eight—

SEMYON. Forty again.

VASSA. And I've never been bothered with nerves—

ANNA (*tossing her cigarette into the fireplace*). My nerves are raw, too. In this huge house everything echoes— At night I hear rustling noises—

VASSA. Rats—and Prokhor's pigeons.

ANNA. Creaking sounds—

VASSA. The dry timber.

ANNA. I see shadows stirring—

VASSA. That's Lipa walking—nobody else.

SEMYON. Leave off, Mother, don't remind us of her—

VASSA (*reflectively*). She keeps walking and walking—

ANNA. But you don't believe that suicides come back.

VASSA. I don't know. How should I know?

SEMYON. There you go. Mother believes only in one thing—the ruble.

VASSA (*not unkindly*). You're an idiot, Semyon. Who have we been saving up the rubles for, if not the children? And they, it turns out, aren't worth a single ruble. You, for one, ought to keep quiet—you couldn't bear me a healthy grandchild.

SEMYON (*brusquely*). That's a lie!

ANNA. Semyon!

SEMYON. I had a healthy child—

VASSA. By a servant.

SEMYON. What's the difference? I had a child. As for her being a servant, you got her for me yourself.

VASSA. And the baby was born dead. There, Anna—

SEMYON (*jumping to his feet*). Nothing of the sort! It wasn't born dead! She did away with it herself—she told Natalya about it, and it's no use lying. You threw some sort of scare into her, and all her life you used the child to keep her frightened. That's why she hanged herself.

VASSA (*calmly*). There, Anna, listen—

ANNA (*in an indignant tone*). How can you say such horrid things, Semyon? It's awful!

VASSA. Take it all in, Anna. You're a mother, too, it'll do you good.

SEMYON. You're wasting your time buttering up Mother, Anna Zakharovna—your plans won't work! (*Goes off, slamming the door.*)

VASSA (*laughingly*). Look at him!

ANNA. Oh, Mother! Now I understand how hard it is for you to put up with all this—

VASSA. I don't mind. I don't get hurt so easily. But you keep right on understanding—it's something you need—

ANNA. Sometimes I'm even—afraid for you—

VASSA. No occasion for that—

ANNA. And I don't understand everything.

VASSA. Well, I don't suppose anybody can understand everything. I have all sorts of thoughts swarming in my head—buzzing like bees, but I can't get any answer, any solution for them— (*Pauses.*) Have you ever thought about how men—from birth—are always part of their fathers, never of their mothers? Well, one day you too will have to think about it. There, to protect that fool's health, I permitted him to have a mistress in the house, and he throws back at me the sin I took upon my soul for his sake. And the good-for-nothing damaged his health all the same—picked up something in the village—

ANNA (*in a low voice*). Is it really true that the child was—

VASSA. And if it is true? Well? What should I have done?

ANNA. I don't know. I don't see why—

VASSA. There you are. You too have condemned me. But if it ever happens to you, you'll do the same, Anna.

ANNA. That's too remote. I don't want to think about it.

VASSA. You will think, my dear—you'll think about everything.

ANNA. By the way, Mother, Uncle has written two letters to his son.

VASSA (*starting*). What did he say in them?

ANNA. He's asking him to come here.

VASSA. To us? That boy? Are you sure?

ANNA (*producing them*). Here are the letters.

VASSA. You have them! I see. They haven't been mailed. But wait—what are you going to do with them?

ANNA. I think they shouldn't be mailed.

VASSA. That's right, my friend! They shouldn't. Under no circumstances. You're really clever. You see, that's the woman in you! No, it's not the watchdogs that guard the home, it's we women— (*Comes up to* ANNA *and places her hands on her shoulders.*) Sell them!

ANNA. Oh, Mother! How can you?

VASSA. A hundred for both— One hundred.

ANNA. Take them— You offend me, Mother.

VASSA. I don't offend you, Anna. I know what offends. Stupidity does. Remember, you're a mother—there can be no shame if it's for one's children—remember that. Nor sin either. You must know that—no sin!

ANNA. You are—wonderful!

VASSA (*hiding the letters away*). All mothers are wonderful. We're all sinners—and martyrs too. The Lord's judgment on us will be terrible, but I'll never go down on my knees before my fellow men. Remember, all human beings live through us. I'll tell all to Our Mother of God—she'll understand. She pities us sinners. Didn't she

say to the archangel, "Ask, beseech my dear son to order me too to suffer in hell with the great sinners?" That's the sort she is!

ANNA (*smiling affectionately*). And I came here thinking I was clever, better than you—

VASSA. Never mind. Go on thinking it. I know—that's how it should be. If you make a mistake I'll correct you. It's all right, daughter.

ANNA. If you say so. But wait—how about his letters? He'll get better, and he'll mail his other letters himself. Or he'll give them to me to send by registered mail—where shall I get the receipts?

VASSA. We have lots of old ones in the office. Mikhail will fix it—he'll change the town and the name—and the seal too. Don't worry, it's been done before. It's nothing. We did it many a time when your father got himself a mistress in town. You'd better watch out Prokhor doesn't send his letters through somebody else.

ANNA. Of course—I will.

VASSA. Watch Lyuda. She's a child.

ANNA. They've quarreled. Besides, she tells me everything.

VASSA. Look out. Remember, if we can keep Prokhor's money, your children will have their share of it.

ANNA (*lowering her eyes*). Let's not talk about that, Mother.

VASSA. Stop hedging. I have my glasses on. I see everything.

ANNA. You're always—so blunt.

VASSA. Of course. And I want you to talk to me in the same way.

ANNA. I feel as if I were seeing you for the first time.

VASSA. Look, I'm a mother to you, and to your children too. Wait—somebody's coming. (*The door opens quietly, admitting* NATALYA, *who looks pale and weak.*) Why are you walking about, you little goose?

NATALYA. I was called to tea, but the table isn't laid yet—

VASSA. All right, lay it. Where's Lyudmila?

NATALYA. She's with Uncle.

VASSA. I see. Well— (*With her eyes she signals* ANNA *to leave the room, but* ANNA *fails to catch her meaning.*) Go ask Prokhor, Anna, if he'll have tea with us.

ANNA (*going off*). I'll do that.

VASSA (*watching* NATALYA). Feeling better?

NATALYA. I can't sleep—and I'm all upset— The wife of that man you fired from the works has been to see me again.

VASSA. She's wasting her time.

NATALYA. She keeps crying.

VASSA. That's useless, too. Tears won't wash even a rag.

Enter DUNYA. *She bows in silence and takes over laying the table from* NATALYA. VASSA *walks about the room, her spectacles pushed up on her forehead.*

NATALYA (*insistently*). You should forgive him—in memory of the dead.

VASSA. Dead men take no part in the business. And you keep out of it, too.

NATALYA (*flaring up*). I can't help feeling sorry for people.

VASSA. If they don't want to work, there isn't much use being sorry for them. Didn't you fire the lazy nurse you had in short order?

NATALYA. That's different. I had to think of my child.

VASSA. Everybody has children. I have mine, and they need good workers. I'll be no mother to them if I leave them to the mercy of drunkards and loafers. (ANISYA, *the new maid, comes in carrying a samovar.*) Hey, you clumsy cow, you're spilling the water.

ANISYA (*to* DUNYA). Give me the key to the pantry.

DUNYA (*quietly*). Run along! I'll open it myself.

They both go off.

VASSA. A fine girl—strong, nimble with her hands—a pleasure to look at! (*Enter* PAVEL, *a little tipsy. He sits down at the table.*) You should wipe your feet, my lord. Look at the mess you've made.

PAVEL. So I've made a mess—what of it?

VASSA. That's fine! ANNA *appears at the door.*

ANNA (*shouting*). Mother!

VASSA. I'm coming. What is it? (*Goes off.*)

NATALYA (*sniffing*). There's a smell of wine.

PAVEL. There certainly is.

NATALYA (*after a pause*). Lyudmila—

PAVEL. Yes, go on.

NATALYA. Has made up with Uncle Prokhor.

PAVEL. I know.

NATALYA. Oh, Pavel, I'm so sorry for you—

PAVEL. You're sorry for everybody—and what good is it?

NATALYA. We're both alike—

PAVEL. Are you lopsided, too? I didn't know that.

NATALYA. We're alike in our fates. We're both intelligent.

PAVEL. You're intelligent. I didn't know that either.

DUNYA *appears at the door and is about to enter, but, hearing a conversation in progress, hides herself.*

NATALYA. Stop joking. Mother thinks I'm a nitwit, treats me like a stranger. My husband's a master here, but I live like a servant. My orders are ignored.

PAVEL. I don't give a damn!

NATALYA. Don't you? But you're in the same boat—you have no freedom either.

PAVEL (*the warmth of the room making him more tipsy*). That's over and done with! Now I can assert myself. I'll go into town—to Moscow—all over. To hell with you—the house, the land, the whole business—I'm through. And that's that!

SEMYON, *coming in, catches sight of* DUNYA. *He sneaks up behind her, grabs her by the shoulders, and bellows.*

SEMYON. Spy on people, will you?

NATALYA. Mother taught her that—

DUNYA. Oh, please, how can you?

SEMYON. What were you doing behind the door?

PAVEL. Punch her in the neck! The old hag!

DUNYA. I didn't mean anything. I heard you talking and didn't want to disturb you— I wasn't even trying to understand what you were saying.

PAVEL. You won't fool me!

SEMYON. No, you won't fool him. He's a great hand at eavesdropping himself. *Enter* PROKHOR, *supported by* ANNA *and* LYUDMILA.

PROKHOR. Whoa! What's all the noise?

NATALYA. She's been eavesdropping.

LYUDMILA. Let her go, Semyon. How you love torturing people!

NATALYA. What about you?

PROKHOR. Hush! No fights!

SEMYON. We'll have to think up some punishment for her.

PAVEL. Jam her nose in the door—that'll teach her—

LYUDMILA. Disgusting!

SEMYON. No, let her drink some oil from an icon lamp.

PAVEL. That may do.

ANNA (*severely*). Leave her alone, Semyon. Enough! Go, Dunya.

DUNYA *leaves the room.*

NATALYA (*to* PAVEL). Now we have *her* ordering us around—

PAVEL. That won't last long. Nothing will last long.

SEMYON. Look, Anna, where do you get such notions?

PROKHOR. So you're catching on at last! Fathead!

PAVEL. And I'm going to let two cats into the pigeon house tonight.

ANNA. Pavel! Stop annoying Uncle, you hear me?

PAVEL. Who do you think you are?

ANNA. Your elder sister.

PROKHOR. Don't argue with him! I'll let him!

SEMYON. There's no call for you, Anna—

NATALYA. As far as belonging to this family goes, you are a sliced-off piece of bread.

PAVEL. Let her talk—it won't last long. Nothing will last long.

SEMYON. You got your share—you're through!

VASSA *and* MIKHAIL *appear in the doorway.*

PROKHOR (*to* LYUDMILA). Can you picture what it'll be like here in a week or two? Ho!

LYUDMILA. It won't be like anything.

PAVEL (*to* PROKHOR). You can count on me asking you to get the hell out of here. That's what it'll be like.

PROKHOR. You little bastard! As though anybody could make me stay!

ANNA. Stop it, Uncle! Pavel, if you persist in annoying Uncle, it may—

PROKHOR. Don't tell him that! He'll do it on purpose.

ANNA (*to* PAVEL). It may endanger his health— He may die of a heart attack, the doctor says.

PROKHOR. There you go! What was the point of that? Ah!

LYUDMILA. You shouldn't have said that, Anna—

PROKHOR. Now they'll do it deliberately—

ANNA. Don't excite yourself—

NATALYA. What do you mean, talking about us like that? Is Pavel a criminal? How can you suggest such things?

PROKHOR (*to* ANNA). Just listen to her! A full-blown lady of the manor, isn't she?

VASSA (*entering the room with* MIKHAIL). She's in a hurry.

Everybody quiets down.

MIKHAIL (*to* PROKHOR). Good morning.

PROKHOR. Ah, Disraeli, spinach daily, fishes scaly! Good morning! Good morning! SEMYON *laughs.* PAVEL *watches his uncle.*

VASSA (*sitting down*). Was it you, Semyon, who gave orders to put that Klyamzin clerk back on his job?

SEMYON. Yes, I gave the order. He's a good fellow. And as for his drinking—

VASSA. That's nothing, I take it? Especially when it's the wife who pleads. Was it?

SEMYON. Natalya had nothing to do with it.

VASSA. I meant the clerk's wife.

LYUDMILA. You've given yourself away, Semyon.

PAVEL. You keep quiet!

NATALYA (*to* LYUDMILA). There's nothing to hide. I did ask Semyon.

PROKHOR (*shaking his head*). Hard times have come upon you, Vassa. I pity you.

VASSA (*calmly*). Thanks. Don't forget to save some pity for yourself.

PROKHOR (*with malicious joy*). You're going to be in a tough spot, by God! The way people are today! They say Russians are soft and kind—

NATALYA. Where do you see mean people! We're not mean.

LYUDMILA (*to* ANNA). Do you think they're mean?

ANNA. I don't know.

LYUDMILA. I believe she's right—there are no mean people here.

PROKHOR. I don't think!

LYUDMILA (*passionately*). No, there are only miserable people here. And they're miserable because they have no love in their hearts—

PAVEL. You lie! I have! I love!

SEMYON (*to* NATALYA, *with a wink*). Whew!

LYUDMILA. And not one of them knows what's good.

PROKHOR. You're right there. They don't know.

VASSA (*somberly*). Then what is good, my brainy one?

MIKHAIL (*casting wary glances at his daughter*). Y-yes! You certainly—

LYUDMILA. Your garden is good, Mother! I've loved it since I was a child, and when I walk in it now I love you for having given beauty to the land.

VASSA (*proudly, to* ANNA). Do you hear that? A woman knows!

LYUDMILA. Sometimes I feel scared when I'm with you—

MIKHAIL. Lyudmila, you'd better—

VASSA. Leave her alone.

LYUDMILA. Don't be afraid, Father. Well, every time I look at the garden I remember you bending over and busying yourself with the apple trees and berries and flowers. You, Mother, you know what's good! You do, but except for you there's nobody—

PROKHOR. Well, I wouldn't go so far—

SEMYON. Natalya— Whew!

LYUDMILA. And they'll never know. Everything good will pass them by—through another street—yes, everything.

NATALYA. Such a prophetess!

PROKHOR. What's she after?

SEMYON (*in a low voice*). She and Anna are both playing up to Mother. Are they going to ask her for something, I wonder?

VASSA. You might think to yourself, not out loud, dear child.

NATALYA. He doesn't have to be afraid of anybody.

SEMYON. Whew!

VASSA. What's this stupid word you have?

SEMYON. Whew? Oh, just whew!

PROKHOR. Go on, Lyuda, say something more.

LYUDMILA. No, I don't feel like it.

VASSA. You don't have to. May God bless you with good children, Lyudmila.

LYUDMILA (*nodding at her husband*). By him? How can anyone have good children by him? *Everybody is startled.*

NATALYA. I must say!

MIKHAIL. What a tongue!

PAVEL (*grasping a teacup*). I'll kill you! (VASSA *joggles his arm, making him drop the cup.*) What's this? Are you taking her side? All right then— Give me my share, my money! Let me have it, and all of you can go—

VASSA (*giving him a push*). Sh-sh!

PAVEL (*choking on the words*). I hate you! I'll burn down the house! Who are you to me? (*Almost crying.*) A mother— Are you a mother? An uncle, a wife, a brother? Who are you to me?

VASSA (*somberly*). And who are you to everybody?

PAVEL. You're baiting me, like dogs after a rabbit—what have I done? Give me what's mine, and I'll go—I'll go!

VASSA. And what is it here that's yours?

NATALYA. Why, everything is his and Semyon's.

ANNA. Be quiet, Natalya.

NATALYA. Why should I?

VASSA. Be still, worm, do as you're told.

NATALYA (*crying*). What have I done, Semyon—

ANNA. This is simply terrible—

LYUDMILA. It's because you're not used to it.

MIKHAIL (*to* LYUDMILA). I want you to keep out of this.

PROKHOR (*to* ANNA). I've got to get out of here—it's too much for me.

NATALYA. Are we little children? Everybody wants to live as he pleases.

PROKHOR. I'm not feeling well, Anna—all this shouting—

ANNA (*hurrying off to* VASSA's *room*). Just a minute, Uncle. Mother!

VASSA *follows her.*

SEMYON (*as* VASSA *crosses the room*). I must say, Mother—

PROKHOR. Lyudmila— Give me a hand, will you?

VASSA (*shouts from her room*). Lyudmila, come here!

ANNA (*running across the dining room*). Just one moment, Uncle. There you see, Pavel, Uncle is feeling bad again.

PAVEL (*shouting*). I'm the master here! I, the cripple! Let him die like a dog! And that goes for all of you!

PROKHOR (*his face purple, half rises from his chair and speaks in gasps*). Ah—so? Mikhail, take me away—he'll kill me!

PAVEL (*skipping about in front of him*). You bet I will! You bet! Just one poke and—

General confusion. NATALYA *tries to lead* PROKHOR *back to his chair.* SEMYON, *grasping* PAVEL *by the arm, shouts at him.*

NATALYA. Leave him alone, Pavel.

MIKHAIL. Please—calm yourselves!

SEMYON. Pavel, stop it! Go away, Uncle! Mother! They're fighting!

PAVEL. I've been wanting to do it for a long time—for all you've done to me— Take this!

He pushes his uncle hard in the chest. PROKHOR *draws himself up and kicks* PAVEL. *With an exclamation of pain,* PAVEL *sits down on the floor, while* PROKHOR *slumps heavily into his chair.* ANNA *runs in with a bottle of medicine.* VASSA *and* LYUDMILA *emerge quickly from* VASSA's *room.* VASSA *hastens to* PAVEL, *who is rolling about on the floor clutching his leg.* ANNA *bends over her uncle.* SEMYON *remains standing at his wife's side.* MIKHAIL, *holding* LYUDMILA *by the arm, whispers something to her imploringly.*

SEMYON (*to* NATALYA). Let's get out of here! Quick!

VASSA (*to* PAVEL). What did he hit you with?

ANNA. I told you, Pavel—

NATALYA. Wait.

PAVEL. Leave me alone, Mother.

ANNA. Get some water.

MIKHAIL. Do you get me?

LYUDMILA (*to* MIKHAIL). Let go. You can tell me afterward.

VASSA (*rising*). Hot water?

LYUDMILA. Yes—for his chest.

MIKHAIL. You should do that in his room.

LYUDMILA. No, no! Here!

ANNA. Your father's right. Lift him. Semyon, give a hand!

NATALYA (*watching everybody nervously*). Don't touch him, Semyon! Oh, I'm scared! They deliberately set Pavel on Uncle. Where are you going? MIKHAIL, ANNA, *and* SEMYON *carry* PROKHOR *out.*

VASSA. What's that you're hissing?

NATALYA. So? Am I a snake?

VASSA. What did you say?

NATALYA. But really, Mother!

VASSA. Really, nothing! Well?

NATALYA. We're not servants—we're masters now!

VASSA (*in a low voice*). Get out!

SEMYON *returns.* PAVEL *rises from the floor and, dragging his foot and holding on to the furniture, makes his way over to* VASSA.

NATALYA. Don't take that tone to me! Semyon, she's snapping my head off!

SEMYON (*trying to speak impressively*). Now, Mother, no more of that! I'm twenty-seven, he's twenty-four—you can't argue that away. (VASSA *pushes her spectacles up on her brow and fixes him with her eyes.*) What are you staring at me for? Whichever way you look at it, there's the law of majority—and sons are the legal heirs—therefore—there can be no argument.

VASSA (*to* PAVEL). Go see how Uncle is—

PAVEL. I don't want to—I won't go.

SEMYON. Yes—now we do as we please.

VASSA (*with a sigh*). You're a born fool, Semyon.

SEMYON (*flaring up*). That'll be enough of your insults. I may be a fool, but I'm in control according to the law. And, please—

ANNA (*hurrying in*). Mother! I think Uncle's dead—

General silence. PAVEL *sits down on a chair, pressing his head against its back.* SEMYON *stands motionless, as if in a stupor, blinking his eyes.* NATALYA *clings to him, trembling.* VASSA, *her hands at her sides and her head bowed, turns to the icon in the downstage corner and moves her lips silently.* ANNA, *her fingers playing nervously over her breast, gazes at her mother. The expression of fear on* NATALYA'S *face gradually gives way to one of joy.*

SEMYON (*whispering*). How do you like that!

NATALYA (*also in a whisper*). Now—do you understand?—everything is ours!

ANNA. Sh-sh! Quiet.

VASSA (*softly*). Well, Pavel, now you've got your heart's desire.

PAVEL. I'm not to blame— I was drunk.

SEMYON. Ah, Pavel! Sorry, fellow.

VASSA *and* ANNA *leave the room, but* ANNA *stops just across the threshold.*

NATALYA (*ingratiatingly*). Tell the truth, Pavel—did they tell you to hit Uncle?

PAVEL (*wearily*). Go away—with your stupid talk!

SEMYON (*to* NATALYA). What are you making up here?

ANNA (*reëntering*). You see what you've done, Pavel? I warned you not to touch him, didn't I?

NATALYA (*suspiciously*). It looked to me as if you were egging him on.

PAVEL. I'm not to blame.

NATALYA. God will decide who's to blame. He knows all!

MIKHAIL, LYUDMILA, *and* VASSA *return.* MIKHAIL'S *hand is wrapped in a handkerchief.* LYUDMILA *goes to a corner, sits down, and cries silently.*

VASSA (*solemnly*). He's passed away.

NATALYA (*to* SEMYON, *in a whisper*). Look at his hand—

SEMYON (*startled, in a loud voice*). Where? Whose hand?

VASSA (*to* NATALYA). What are you talking about?

NATALYA. Who, me? I said to Semyon that Mikhail Vassilyevich's hand—

MIKHAIL (*with scarcely disguised sarcasm*). My hand? I damaged it a little—knocking against a doorknob, as we were carrying the deceased. Why? It doesn't hurt me, if that's what interests you—not a bit— All the same, thanks for your concern!

VASSA. Please keep still, all of you. Stop crying, Lyudmila. Well, Pavel, what is it to be now? What shall we do? (*Her voice trembles. She pauses, moving her lips.*) As you know, ours is not a united family, our dirty linen will be aired in public. Dark rumors will spread about us—

PAVEL. Leave me alone—

VASSA (*lowering her voice*). The police may step in too—there's money involved. Uncle Prokhor had over a hundred thousand in our business—

SEMYON (*to* NATALYA, *in a whisper*). By George! That's really—whew!

VASSA. It's well known that he wanted to take his money out— So, you see how tangled up everything is. You were warned—don't touch him—you'll kill him—but you went on and did it on purpose— Do you realize what you've done—what a terrible sin it is?

PAVEL (*muttering*). Stop it. Don't torture the life out of me! (*Suddenly realizing the danger threatening him, seized with fear, he jumps*

to his feet and stares at everybody.) My dear ones! Don't tell anybody! I don't want to be— What's to be done, Mother? Semyon?

VASSA. We'll stand by you, of course—before other people. But how will you justify yourself before God? So here's my advice to you —if this unrighteous business ends well for you, go into a monastery.

Everybody is surprised. LYUDMILA *moves toward* VASSA *as if blind, a smile on her lips.*

NATALYA (*to* SEMYON). Oh, that's fine! You understand, don't you?

PAVEL (*nonplussed*). I don't want that! What's the idea? Semyon, I don't want it!

VASSA (*speaking more firmly*). I'll make a good donation for you, and you'll live there in peace, safe from harm, you'll get accustomed to praying to God, and you can pray for us, too—

PAVEL (*wearily*). Lyudmila's—pleased! Have you no pity for me, Lyudmila? Look what they're doing to me— (*Struck by the expression on* LYUDMILA'S *face.*) How happy you look! Thank you, Mother! A fine wife you got me!

VASSA. You wanted her yourself.

MIKHAIL. You certainly did!

VASSA. Remember, you threatened to cut your throat?

NATALYA. Of course. I heard it too.

VASSA (*sternly*). You hold your tongue! (*Softly, but inflexibly.*) Well then, Pavel, make a vow that you'll become a monk— This way it'll be better for you and for all of us— Nobody will criticize you or make fun of you there for not being—handsome. For myself, I'll know that my son lives in a quiet place and is treated with respect. There you have it. Well, think it over, and tomorrow I hope to hear you say you agree.

PAVEL (*to* LYUDMILA). Smiling at my ruination? I'll remember that!

LYUDMILA. No, Pavel. I'm smiling at my freedom— (*She goes down on her knees where she stands, near* VASSA, *far away from* PAVEL.) You're a human being, Pavel— You have a drop of kindness in you, haven't you? Let me go! In the name of God, let me go! I'll always be grateful to you. I swear to God I'll think of you with a caress in my heart—perhaps the only one who will think of you like that— yes, the only one except your mother! But I can't—live with you! It hurts me to touch you, especially after today—Pavel! (*All are silent.* VASSA *sits with lowered head.* ANNA *whispers something into her ear.*) Pavel dear! Darling! Let me go!

PAVEL (*with a shudder*). Don't! Don't speak like that! All right— I'll go away! It makes no difference. You want a divorce? Well, it makes no difference anyway— (LYUDMILA *rises, walks up to him, and, not touching him with her hands, kisses him on the brow.* PAVEL *starts back from her.*) God! Like kissing a dead man! Why do that? You're a witch. Mother, I won't go into a monastery! Let 'em bring me to trial— The police and all that— The devil with you! It's only your

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lies! So you can grab my money, that's all. Give me my money and I'll go away from you—to the end of the world— You'll never hear from me—never! One day I may get rich, who knows, and you'll be down and out and come to me begging for alms. I'll order my men to drive you away, and watch from the window as they carry out my orders. Give me my money. We've fooled around long enough!

VASSA (*calmly*). I won't give you any money.

NATALYA (*distressed*). What? It's not possible!

PAVEL. Oh, yes, you will!

SEMYON (*softly and quietly*). There's the law, Mother! This is an inheritance!

VASSA (*with a sigh*). There's no inheritance for you. Your father's will leaves everything to me—

MIKHAIL. That's perfectly true—

NATALYA (*to* SEMYON, *despondently*). They've forged it!

VASSA (*regarding* NATALYA). To own and possess wholly and indivisibly.

MIKHAIL (*in a businesslike tone*). As attested by witnesses—Father Yegor, Antip Stepanovich Mukhoyedov, who's known to you, and also the landowner Ryzhev—

SEMYON (*dejectedly*). Maybe you're wrong, Mother? Why should we be treated like that? Show us the paper—where is it?

MIKHAIL (*producing papers*). The original is with the notary public. The copies, two in number, are here—one for you—and one for you—

PAVEL (*pushing the paper away*). I don't want it! It makes no difference—I didn't believe I'd get my freedom—and nothing has come of it— (*Pauses.*) And nothing ever will—

NATALYA *cries, covering her face with her hands.*

VASSA (*in a low voice*). Well, Pavel?

PAVEL (*looking around*). You've got me cornered— All right. Monks don't live in hell, they live on the earth, after all—so let it be—

MIKHAIL (*reassuringly*). And they live well!

PAVEL (*with a snicker*). Good-by, Lyudmila— Oh, yes, you've already said good-by to me. Well, out of charity, give me another kiss—

LYUDMILA (*coming up to him*). But don't touch me with your hands—

PAVEL. I don't want it! Go away! You devils! (*Runs off.*)

VASSA (*to* MIKHAIL). Watch him. Quick!

MIKHAIL (*on his way out*). May I report the death of Prokhor Ivanovich?

VASSA. It should have been done long ago. What have you been thinking about?

SEMYON (*sadly*). So, Mother—

VASSA (*waving him away*). Run along, son. How could you live without your mother, especially with a stupid woman like that?

NATALYA (*bowing low, reluctantly*). Forgive me, Mother, if I've done anything—

VASSA. You run along too. As if I had nothing better to do than be cross with you—

SEMYON *and* NATALYA *go off, visibly depressed.* VASSA, *rising, loses her balance and seems about to faint.*

ANNA (*supporting* VASSA). What is it? What's the matter?

VASSA (*hoarsely*). Some water—cold—my chest is burning—

LYUDMILA *rushes off.*

ANNA. You're worn out with worry—

VASSA (*somewhat recovered*). I'm tired— It's hard to have to do it to a son—you understand—he *is* my son, after all.

ANNA. It's marvelous how you thought of a monastery on the spur of the moment! It was like a miracle!

VASSA. On the spur of the moment! I've spent years—and heaven knows how many sleepless nights—thinking what to do with him. There are no miracles for such as me— No, sir! We have to labor for everything—

LYUDMILA (*rushing in*). Drink it—quick! (VASSA *drinks the water.*) Oh, God! Here's a dead man in the house, sorrow—and I feel nothing! Mother, you're wonderful—the way you do things—like a fairy godmother.

VASSA (*quietly*). Are you pleased?

LYUDMILA. I'll live a new life now—

VASSA. Live with me. Find a good man, and I'll see to your dowry. You'll find one, I'm sure. Bear children—a lot of them—I'll look on them as my grandchildren—I'm very fond of you— And you, Anna, you come live with me too—bring your children with you— My sons haven't been a success—so I'll console myself with grandchildren. (*Listens.*) The garden won't be wasted. Your youngsters—sweet little animals—will be running around in it— Listen, what's that?

ANNA. I don't hear anything, Mother.

VASSA. You don't? I thought I heard something. Oh, my daughters —I've done much evil—I've sinned—against worthless people, it's true; all the same—you feel sorry for them after you've bested them. Love me, my daughters—a little. I don't ask for much—just a little. After all, I'm human—I've done such a thing to my son—my own flesh and blood— (*Springs to her feet, alarmed.*) Is he crying? Is he?

LYUDMILA. No, no! You imagine it!

ANNA (*gently*). It's all quiet. Calm yourself.

VASSA (*wearily*). I seem to hear things— (*Pauses.*) I'll never know peace—never!

ANNA *and* LYUDMILA *exchange glances and bend over* VASSA. *Removing her spectacles,* VASSA *looks up at them with a grim smile.*

CURTAIN

THE ZYKOVS

Antipa Zykov, the principal character of this play, belongs to the type of Russian businessmen who owed their success in life to their masterful personalities. They were the Russian merchant adventurers who opened Siberia to economic development, organized shipping companies on the Volga, bought and sold large estates, and rose to be the financial and industrial princes of the country. There is nothing small about Antipa. He is the authentic possessor of "the Russian soul" with its intensity of feeling and its ability to swing from one extreme to another.

Antipa's young wife Pavla is far more uncommon as a character. The fact that she was brought up in a convent (a comparatively unusual experience for a Russian girl, for Russian convents did not have schools for children as Catholic convents have in other countries) is to be held largely responsible for her faith in love as the guiding principle of life. But she never realizes that love as conceived and practiced in the cloistered world of a convent is too weak and passive a thing to control the actions of people in the storm-tossed world of human passions. This collision between the convent love which insists on the *sentiment* of love and the worldly love which insists on *actions* expressive of love forms the basis of the play and, in a sense, reflects the political controversy between the followers of Leo Tolstoy who preached non-resistance to evil, and the believers in political action who regarded force as the proper weapon of love and goodness.

A. B.

THE ZYKOVS

CHARACTERS

Anna Markovna Tselovanyeva
Sophia Ivanovna, Antipa Zykov's sister, a widow
Palageya, a servant
Mikhail (Misha), Antipa Zykov's son
Shokhin, a forest warden
Antipa Ivanovich Zykov, a timber merchant
Pavla (Pasha), Anna Markovna Tselovanyeva's daughter
Vassily Pavlovich Muratov, a forester
Matvey Ilich Tarakanov, Antipa Zykov's bookkeeper
Styopka, a young girl
Gustav Yegorovich Hevern, Antipa Zykov's partner

ACT I

A drab-looking room in the unpretentious, lower middle-class house of the TSELOVANYEVAS. *In the center of the room a table laid for tea. Against the wall, between the two doors leading to the kitchen and to* ANNA MARKOVNA'S *room respectively, another table, with wines and refreshments. Right, by the wall, a small harmonium, with framed photographs and two vases of dried flowers on top. On the wall above, numerous picture postcards and a water-color portrait of* PAVLA *dressed as a convent choirgirl. Two windows look out onto the front garden and the street.*

ANNA MARKOVNA, *a neat, smooth-looking woman of over forty, is sitting at the tea table. She is noticeably agitated, often glances out the windows, listens, fidgets with the cups on the table.* SOPHIA, *an extinguished cigarette in her mouth, paces up and down the room absorbed in thought.*

ANNA MARKOVNA (*sighing*). They're late.

SOPHIA (*glancing at her wristwatch*). Yes.

ANNA MARKOVNA. I'm surprised you've never remarried, Sophia Ivanovna.

SOPHIA. I can't find a man after my heart. When I do, I'll marry.

ANNA MARKOVNA. There are few interesting men in this backwater.

SOPHIA. An interesting man could be found, but it's hard to meet a serious one.

ANNA MARKOVNA. If I may say so, you're a woman of serious character yourself—like a man in that respect. You ought to get yourself a quiet husband.

SOPHIA (*answering somewhat unwillingly*). What will he be good for if he's quiet? To catch mice?

ANNA MARKOVNA *smiles embarrassedly. She appears to be ill at ease with* SOPHIA—*does not know how to talk to her.* SOPHIA, *her hands behind her back, gazes at her, frowning.*

Tell me, who spread the rumor about Pasha—that she's slightly off?

ANNA MARKOVNA (*hurriedly, in a low voice, as she glances about*). It was my late husband's doing—and I too kept it up, so that people would leave her alone. Pasha has always been too outspoken, saying everything she thinks. Naturally, nobody likes that. You see? And then my husband had a suspicion that Pasha wasn't his daughter—

SOPHIA. Really?

ANNA MARKOVNA. He certainly had. Everybody knows that. He used to shout about it when he got drunk. He was jealous of a man here—a sectarian—

SOPHIA. Shokhin's father?

ANNA MARKOVNA. You see, you know it too.

SOPHIA. In no connection with your name. I only know there was a sectarian here who was persecuted.

ANNA MARKOVNA (*with a sigh*). Well, I don't know about no connection. (*In a low voice.*) But, God, he was persecuted. (*With a quick glance at* SOPHIA.) My husband would sometimes stare at her for a while and then suddenly roar—This is not my daughter! I'm a low fellow, and you—that's me—are a fool—she's not my daughter!

SOPHIA. He rather liked dramatizing himself, didn't he?

ANNA MARKOVNA. God knows!

SOPHIA. Did he beat you?

ANNA MARKOVNA. Of course. But I didn't worry about myself. It was Pasha that I was afraid for. Somehow I got around him and hid her in a convent—you see I have nothing to hope for except her.

The servant PALAGEYA *appears at the kitchen door.*

PALAGEYA. They're coming!

ANNA MARKOVNA. You gave me a fright, you devil! You'd think it was enemies coming. What do you want?

PALAGEYA. Shall I bring in the samovar?

ANNA MARKOVNA. You'll be told when necessary. Go away.

Enter MIKHAIL. *He is slightly tipsy, is sweltering from the heat, and has a tired smile on his beardless face.*

MIKHAIL. Don't stop up the door, woman. Take away your circumference.

He pinches the servant, making her scream, and laughs with a kind of whimpering laughter. ANNA MARKOVNA *tightens her lips, looking offended.* SOPHIA, *standing near the harmonium, frowns at her nephew, as he walks to the table.*

It's hot, my mother-in-law to be! And here you're busying yourselves with teapots, sugar bowls—

ANNA MARKOVNA. Our Palageya is a little stupid—

MIKHAIL. Who is?

ANNA MARKOVNA. The servant woman.

MIKHAIL. Oh, I see. Only she? I'll make a note of that.

He turns to the table with the refreshments. SOPHIA *strikes a few low chords on the harmonium.*

ANNA MARKOVNA (*in a disturbed tone*). Why do you want to make a note of it?

SOPHIA. He's joking, Anna Markovna.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Oh, I'm so bad at understanding things.

PALAGEYA (*from the kitchen*). A man's just come on horseback.

SOPHIA. That's Shokhin. That's for me, Anna Markovna.

SHOKHIN *appears at the door.*

SHOKHIN. Shokhin has come.

SOPHIA (*her manner strict*). I would have gone out to see you, Yakov.

SHOKHIN (*bowing*). Never mind! Hello, everybody!

ANNA MARKOVNA (*withdrawing to the window*). Don't mind me—

SOPHIA (*to* SHOKHIN). Well?

SHOKHIN. He ordered me to tell you he would write to you.

SOPHIA. Nothing more?

SHOKHIN. No, that's all.

SOPHIA. Thank you.

She makes a note in a little notebook on her chatelaine. MIKHAIL, *with a wink at* ANNA MARKOVNA, *pours* SHOKHIN *a glass of vodka.* SHOKHIN *downs it furtively and makes a wry face.*

MIKHAIL. Why are you always so gloomy, Yakov?

SHOKHIN. I don't get paid enough. Sophia Ivanovna, I want to tell you something.

SOPHIA. What?

SHOKHIN (*moving toward her*). Yesterday the forester was telling our mechanic that all of us ought to be put on trial for the way we run our estate. Because of us, says he, the rivers are getting shallow and the land is being ruined—

SOPHIA. All right. You may go.

MIKHAIL. Go, slave! SHOKHIN *goes off.*

ANNA MARKOVNA. Was he talking about the forester?

SOPHIA. Yes.

ANNA MARKOVNA. A hard customer, that one. He quarrels with everybody, takes everybody to court, but is always drunk himself and spends all his spare time playing cards. He's a single man, has a good job—why doesn't he get married? People don't care for family life nowadays.

MIKHAIL. Don't they? What about me? I'm getting married.

ANNA MARKOVNA. You are, of course—under your father's orders. (*The words have slipped off her tongue. Embarrassed, she mumbles something and goes into the kitchen quickly.*)

SOPHIA (*to* MIKHAIL). You behave atrociously.

MIKHAIL. Do I? I won't do it again— Do you like my fiancée?

SOPHIA. She's good looking, simple—trusting. Do you like her?

MIKHAIL. Well, yes, I'm even a bit sorry for her— What sort of a husband will I make her?

SOPHIA. Are you serious?

MIKHAIL. I don't know. I believe I am.

SOPHIA. That's fine. Perhaps she'll make you think about yourself. It's time you did.

MIKHAIL. I do nothing but that.

SOPHIA. You fool around too much, always playing—

MIKHAIL. That's human nature. Take my fiancée—she's playing too —at simplicity, kindness—

SOPHIA (*looking at him intently*). What do you mean? She's really trusting.

MIKHAIL. The cat too is trusting. But try and deceive a cat.

SOPHIA. What has deception got to do with it?

MIKHAIL. You know what? It'd be much better if father married her and I got my discharge papers!

SOPHIA. What utter nonsense!

MIKHAIL. Anyway, if he doesn't marry her now, he'll take her away from me later. She's trusting.

SOPHIA. Stop it. What disgusting ideas you get! (*She walks away from him, visibly agitated.*)

MIKHAIL (*pours a glass of wine, laughing quietly, and declaims*).

Reflected in the water,
A flower lured my hand;
But all my fingers captured
Was green and slimy sand.

SOPHIA. What does it mean?

MIKHAIL. Nothing at all, a mere jest.

SOPHIA. Watch out, Misha, life is a serious thing.

Enter from the hall ANTIPA ZYKOV *and* PAVLA. ANTIPA *is getting on toward fifty, with a black beard touched with gray, black eyebrows, and curly hair receding at the temples.* PAVLA *wears a very simple blue dress without a waistline, like a vestment. Over her head and shoulders is a blue chiffon scarf.*

PAVLA. I always speak the truth.

ANTIPA. Do you? We'll see.

PAVLA. You will. Where's Mother?

ANNA MARKOVNA (*from the kitchen*). I'm coming.

ANTIPA *proceeds to the table with the refreshments.* PAVLA, *smiling, moves toward* SOPHIA.

SOPHIA. Tired?

PAVLA. It's hot. I'm thirsty.

SOPHIA. Did you make your dress yourself?

PAVLA. Yes. Why?

SOPHIA. It suits you.

PAVLA. I like to be free—

ANTIPA (*to* MIKHAIL). Steady, you're drinking too much, you'll make a fool of yourself.

MIKHAIL. A man that's getting married must show himself from all sides.

Taking his son by the shoulder, ANTIPA *whispers something to him with a stern face.* MIKHAIL *chuckles.*

SOPHIA (*to* PAVLA, *in a low voice, suddenly*). Which is more handsome?

PAVLA. The older one.

ANTIPA. Shut up!

SOPHIA (*quietly*). What's the matter with you, Antipa?

ANTIPA (*embarrassedly*). You must forgive me, Pavla Nikolayevna. That was for your own good.

PAVLA. What is?

ANTIPA. It's like this— *Enter* ANNA MARKOVNA *carrying a pie.*

ANNA MARKOVNA. Come and have something to eat, ladies and gentlemen—please.

PAVLA (*to* ANTIPA). You have to be kind, or I'll be afraid of you.

ANTIPA (*smiling amiably*). You're always harping on your favorite subject—kindness. Ah, my child— (*He says something to her in a low voice.*)

MIKHAIL (*although tipsy, realizes he is superfluous here, and wanders about the room chuckling to himself. Speaks to* SOPHIA *as he passes her*). This is like a chicken coop—no room to move about.

ANNA MARKOVNA (*watches everybody excitedly, comes over to* SOPHIA). Come to the table, please. Call everybody—they don't listen to me.

SOPHIA (*reflectively*). I like your daughter.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Oh? God grant you keep liking her! I wish you'd look after her, set her right about things—

SOPHIA. Yes, of course. We women always have to pull together.

PAVLA (*to* ANTIPA, *in a tone of surprise*). What about people?

ANTIPA. What about them?

PAVLA. What will they think?

ANTIPA (*with feeling*). I don't give a hang! Let them think what they please. People! What do I owe them? Only suffering and insults. Here's what's helped me to build my life—my own arm! What do I care about people? (*He gulps down some vodka and wipes his mouth with a napkin.*) Now, you're my future—daughter, let's say. You always say one must be gentle and kind. This is the fourth time I've seen you, and your talk is always the same. That's because you've lived in a convent, in purity. If you had to live with people, you'd sing a different tune, my dear! Sometimes it gets so you look at the town and wish to heaven you could set fire to it—

PAVLA. Then I'd be burned in it too.

ANTIPA. Oh, I'd get you— No, you wouldn't be burned.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Why don't you drink or eat something, Mikhail Antipovich?

MIKHAIL. Father doesn't permit me to—

ANTIPA. What's that?

MIKHAIL. And my fiancée doesn't offer it to me.

PAVLA (*blushes and bows*). Please come, I'll pour you—

MIKHAIL. And yourself.

PAVLA. I don't like it—

MIKHAIL. And I like vodka very much.

PAVLA. They say it's bad for one.

MIKHAIL. All of a sudden it's bad! Don't you believe it! Your health!

ANTIPA. Health! People today don't know what it is to be strong and healthy. Am I right, Anna Markovna?

ANNA MARKOVNA. I don't know. My Pasha—

ANTIPA. I'm not talking about her, of course. But take my son, if you like—he hasn't had much to drink, has he? But his eyes are bleary and his face looks stupid—

SOPHIA. Be more careful what you say.

ANNA MARKOVNA (*alarmed*). Your son is still young.

ANTIPA (*to* SOPHIA). What I say is true. Anna Markovna knows how people drank in the old days. Her old man used to lap it up for weeks on end. (*To* ANNA MARKOVNA.) As for being young, that's not very important, youth is temporary, it's a passing thing.

The atmosphere is tense, everybody is waiting for something, each observing the other. SOPHIA *watches her brother and* PAVLA *quite openly.* MIKHAIL *smokes, gazing at his father with dull, drunken eyes.* PAVLA *casts frightened glances here and there.* ANTIPA *is at the table with the refreshments.* PAVLA *lifts the teapot off the samovar. Her mother fidgets around the table whispering to her:* "Oh, Pasha dear, I'm frightened."

SOPHIA (*to* ANTIPA). Aren't you drinking too much?

ANTIPA (*sullenly*). You don't know me, it seems—

SOPHIA. Still, you'd better watch your step—

ANTIPA. Keep out of this. I know what I'm doing.

SOPHIA. Are you sure? (*They eye each other.*) What are you up to?

ANTIPA. What sort of a match is he for her? He can't be changed, but she'll be ruined for nothing—

SOPHIA (*stepping back*). See here, you can't possibly do such a thing!

ANTIPA. Quiet. Don't give me ideas. You'll only make it worse.

MIKHAIL (*with a snicker*). Nothing merry about this betrothal. Everybody's whispering—

ANTIPA. It's your aunt—she's too serious. Ah, pity there aren't more people here.

PAVLA. You see, you too need people.

ANTIPA. Caught me! You *are* stubborn in your thoughts, Pavla Nikolayevna. Well, that's how a woman should be—she must stick to her point against everybody.

PAVLA. And a man?

ANTIPA. A man? He's different. He's wild. Let something cut him to the heart, and he'll rush against anything—like a bear against a spear. Life rates cheaper with him, it seems.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Have some tea, please.

ANTIPA. Something cold would be nice now.

MIKHAIL. My advice is champagne.

ANTIPA. The first sensible advice I've heard from you. Go find it.

MIKHAIL. That I can. (*Goes off to the kitchen on unsteady feet, calling out.*) Hey you, beautiful!

ANTIPA (*winking at* PAVLA). You see? And I've had three times as much as he has. I'm like that in everything—bigger than other people.

PAVLA. Why are you afraid then?

ANTIPA (*surprised*). Afraid? I don't get it.

SOPHIA *is talking animatedly in a low voice to* ANNA MARKOVNA, *but keeps an ear cocked to catch what her brother is saying.*

PAVLA (*noticing* SOPHIA's *attentiveness*). Then why do you try to make my fiancé look cheap?

ANTIPA. Make him look cheap? Why, I'm not forgetting he's my son!

PAVLA (*lowering her voice*). Why do you look at me this way?

ANTIPA. We're going to be living under the same roof—so I want to know what you're like. Now, you were saying life in a convent is quiet and fine. Our home too is like a convent. Only Sophia kicks up dust now and then.

PAVLA. You seem to be really kind, underneath.

ANTIPA. Oh, I don't know! Of course, others see us better than we see ourselves. It amuses me, though, how you stick to your line. No, I don't think I can boast of being kind. (*Flaring up.*) Perhaps there has been something kind and good in my heart, but what can I do with it, where can I apply it? It needs a place where it will fit, and there's no place for kindness in life—no place, you understand, where you can squeeze in the good part of your heart. It's no use giving it to a beggar—he'll spend it all on drink! No, Pavla, I don't like people. There's only one good man in my home, Tarakanov, he used to be an assistant police chief in the country—

SOPHIA. Thank you.

ANTIPA. You? You keep quiet. You're a different sort, a stranger. God alone knows what you are, sister. Are you kind? We've been talking about kindness, and you are neither kind nor cruel—

SOPHIA. It's a fine picture you draw of me.

ANTIPA. Not a bad one. Look, Anna Markovna—she's nearly twenty years younger than me, but in time of trial I turn to her like I would to a mother.

SOPHIA. What's come over you? It's strange— You're so talkative.

ANTIPA. If I am, there must be a reason for it. Well—that man Tarakanov—he was fired from his job for kindness—honestly! He has brains, and knows a lot, but he's no good for any work—just incapable. All he's good for is to be looked at—as something curious, amusing— In the old days they would have made him a court jester—

SOPHIA. You would say something like that! Why a jester?

ANTIPA. That's how I see him. As for you, Sophia, you no longer belong in the Zykov nest. You were married to a nobleman for six years—you have some gentlefolk blood in you—

SOPHIA. You ought to stop talking, Antipa.

ANTIPA. No, wait. You're clever, and good at every kind of business. But then you're a woman, free as a bird—you can take off and fly away—no one can stop you. Now, I've been left alone. And if a man

doesn't always know what he's going to be tomorrow, a woman of your character certainly knows less—you can take that from me!

ANNA MARKOVNA. What about Mikhail Antipich?

ANTIPA (*sullenly*). My son? Well—I know little about him that's good, if I'm to speak the truth. And as we are after an honest deal here, we need the whole truth. Mikhail has little to show for himself. He writes verse, plays the guitar—left high school—through lack of ability—and ability is nothing but patience. Well, I can't brag about my patience either—

PAVLA (*deeply stirred*). What do you think of me, then, if you speak like that about your son and my fiancé?

ANTIPA (*in a low voice, as if to himself*). The right question to ask—

ANNA MARKOVNA. My dear ones, please listen to me— I'm the mother—

SOPHIA (*sternly*). Have you considered well what you're doing?

ANTIPA (*getting to his feet, impressively*). I can't reason things out. Let others do it if they care. I only know what I want. Pavla Nikolayevna, come out with me for a minute—

The three women rise. PAVLA, *as if in a dream, goes into the room next to the kitchen.* ANTIPA *follows her, with a heavy, morose air. The door is left open, and one can hear* ANTIPA *say:* "Sit down—wait, I must collect my thoughts."

ANNA MARKOVNA (*sinking into a chair*). My God! What does he want? How can such a thing be, Sophia Ivanovna?

SOPHIA (*pacing the room agitatedly*). Your daughter is a very intelligent girl—if I understand her well— (*Lights a cigarette and looks around for a place to throw the match.*)

ANNA MARKOVNA. Why, he's after her himself—

SOPHIA. One moment—

ANTIPA (*in the other room*). What sort of a husband will he make for you? You're the same age as he is, but you're more mature in your soul. Marry me! He's older than I am, he's soft. It's I who'll love you like a young man. I will! I'll dress you in brocade, in gold and silver. I've had a hard life, Pavla, and not of the right sort either. Help me to a different life—help me to find joy in something good, to lean my heart against something kind. Will you, Pavla?

SOPHIA (*agitated*). Do you hear? How well he speaks! People of his age love strongly—

ANNA MARKOVNA. I don't understand anything. O Mother of God all merciful! In you rests all my hope—have mercy on my child, keep her from sorrow— I've known sorrow enough for my daughter as well as myself.

SOPHIA. Try not to get excited. I'm as shocked as you are. Although it's in his character. Well, there's little one can do about it. Your daughter doesn't seem to object either.

ANNA MARKOVNA. I can't make any of you out. You came for the

betrothal of your son and nephew, and all of a sudden—what's happened? (*Goes to the room where* PAVLA *and* ANTIPA *are.*) I want to hear—I'm the mother—I can't permit—

ANTIPA (*inside the other room*). God has placed you in my path—Anna Markovna, listen—

The door closes. SOPHIA *paces the room, biting her lips.* MURATOV'S *face pops up in the window—an ironical face, with pouches under the eyes, a pointed beard, and thin hair.*

SOPHIA (*alone*). Oh, my God!

MURATOV. Greetings!

SOPHIA. Oh! How did you get here?

MURATOV. Why? Your faithful attendant Shokhin told me you were here, so I deemed it my duty to pay my respects.

SOPHIA. Through the window?

MURATOV. Well, you know we're plain folk.

SOPHIA. Who believe in the simple life?

MURATOV. Is that irony! Yes, we believe in the simple life. And are you match-making?

SOPHIA. Is that public knowledge already?

MURATOV. Certainly. It's also known that the bride-to-be is not all there—

SOPHIA. You've heard, of course, about my alleged love affair with you?

MURATOV. I have. People anticipate events.

SOPHIA. Have you contradicted this rumor?

MURATOV. Why should I? I'm proud of it.

SOPHIA. Did you by any chance originate it yourself?

MURATOV. That is what's called hitting the nail on the head. But when I'm talked to like that, I become impertinent.

SOPHIA. I'd ask you, though, to leave the window.

MURATOV. All right, I'll go. May I call on you Sunday?

SOPHIA. Please. But you may stay away too.

MURATOV. I'd better come. My respects for the present, and wishing you all possible success—in every enterprise!

SOPHIA. Don't forget to get me copies of the inventory that I asked you for.

MURATOV. I never forget anything— MIKHAIL *returns.*

MIKHAIL. You can't get any champagne in this goddam neighborhood. Look who's here!

MURATOV. What are you doing, bridegroom, running around loose?

MIKHAIL (*waving his hand in dismissal*). Be seeing you tonight.

MURATOV. I hope so. You owe us a farewell stag party.

MIKHAIL. Certainly. MURATOV *disappears.* Where's everybody?

SOPHIA (*watching him intently*). In that room.

MIKHAIL. I'm being put out, is that it? I heard father's oratory.

SOPHIA (*almost contemptuously*). It seems you'll be superfluous everywhere.

MIKHAIL. I told you it'd be better this way. But why did they disturb my peace and quiet? There goes the farewell party! You seem to be bored, Aunt Sonya?

SOPHIA. Yes, with all of you. And more than bored—I'm horrified.

Reënter PAVLA *and* ANTIPA *with* ANNA MARKOVNA, *in tears, close behind.*

ANTIPA (*solemnly*). Look, sister Sophia—we've decided— (*Catches at his heart with his hand.*)

PAVLA. Sophia Ivanovna, please understand and forgive me.

SOPHIA (*embracing her*). I don't know what to say— I don't understand you—

ANTIPA. You mustn't feel hurt, Mikhail. You know, you're young, and there are many girls to choose from—

MIKHAIL. I'm very glad. Honestly, I am. Pavla Nikolayevna, I said that I'm very glad, but you mustn't be cross with me—I know I'm no match for you!

ANTIPA. There, Anna Markovna, you see, just as I told you.

PAVLA (*to* MIKHAIL). We'll all live together like friends—

MIKHAIL (*nodding*). We certainly will—

ANTIPA. Anna Markovna, you mustn't worry. I swear to God, your daughter won't shed a single tear because of me.

ANNA MARKOVNA (*going down on her knees before him*). You once had a mother—she loved you. Think of your mother, kind sir! For your mother's sake, have pity on my daughter!

ANTIPA *and* PAVLA *try to raise her to her feet.* SOPHIA *has turned away toward the wall and wipes her eyes with a handkerchief.* MIKHAIL, *in a state of agitation, drinks one glass of vodka after another.*

PAVLA. Please don't worry, Mother dear. Everything will be all right.

ANTIPA. Ask for any pledge you want, I'll take any vow—only get up. I'll put twenty-five thousand rubles in her name in the bank—there!

SOPHIA. That'll do, my friends. Pour something, Misha! You and I, Anna Markovna, will be the matrons of honor, although I'm rather too young for such a bearded son. (*To* ANTIPA). What's the matter with you? You're shaking as if you were on trial.

ANNA MARKOVNA. My dear people— (*She embraces her daughter and weeps silently.*)

ANTIPA. I feel like sitting down and keeping silent for a few moments, as one does before going on a long journey.

SOPHIA. Well, well. It's too close here. Pavla, take everybody out into the garden.

PAVLA (*to* ANTIPA *and her mother, as she takes them by their hands*).

Come along— ANTIPA, PAVLA, *and* ANNA MARKOVNA *go off.*

MIKHAIL. You asked for a drink—

SOPHIA. Not now—later. You poor boy! (*Puts her arms around his shoulders and strokes his head.*) How are you feeling?

MIKHAIL. I'm all right, Aunt Sonya— Honestly, I don't care.

SOPHIA. Let's go into the garden.

MIKHAIL. No, I won't go out there.

SOPHIA. Why not?

MIKHAIL. I don't want to.

SOPHIA (*looking in his eyes, quietly*). So you do care?

MIKHAIL (*with a chuckle*). I feel a little embarrassed for father. He's such a handsome man, so strong, so of a piece, like cast metal. Strange to see him go after sweetmeats—

SOPHIA (*going off, with a smile*). What can you do? A man always hankers after a little happiness—just a little—

CURTAIN

ACT II

The garden of the ZYKOV *house, showing, left, the wide veranda of the house. Opposite the veranda, seated at a table under a linden tree, are* PAVLA, *doing some embroidery work;* MIKHAIL, *with a guitar; and* TARAKANOV, *an old man with a long beard, wearing a duck suit and looking odd and somewhat droll. Upstage, just beyond the end of the veranda,* ANNA MARKOVNA *is making jam. With her is the young girl* STYOPKA.

TARAKANOV. This is all due to the convulsion of ideas so no one knows his right place.

PAVLA (*repeats pensively*). Convulsion of ideas.

TARAKANOV. Exactly.

MIKHAIL (*strumming his guitar*). Why don't you tell us something from life, Matvey Ilich, and skip the philosophy?

TARAKANOV. You can't do without philosophy, since everything has its hidden meaning which we must know.

MIKHAIL. Why must we?

TARAKANOV. What do you mean?

MIKHAIL. Suppose I don't want to know anything?

TARAKANOV. You can't do that.

MIKHAIL. But I don't want to.

TARAKANOV. That's just a whim of youth.

PAVLA. Don't argue, you two, and talk simply.

TARAKANOV. Suppose you're told to get out of the way, and you don't understand it—

MIKHAIL. Well?

TARAKANOV. Well—you'll be knocked down.

MIKHAIL. I can always get out of the way, Matvey Ilich, I'm too particular—

PAVLA (*glancing at him*). Don't lose your tempers— That's when one's apt to make the most mistakes.

TARAKANOV. I don't understand what being particular means.

ANNA MARKOVNA. For goodness' sake, stop spreading gloom! Pavla, would you like to taste the jam?

PAVLA. No, thank you, not now. I'll have it with pancakes for supper if you order them for me.

MIKHAIL. Why only for you? I may like pancakes with jam too.

PAVLA (*with a sigh*). Drinkers don't like sweets.

MIKHAIL. That's known as an aphorism.

PAVLA. What is?

MIKHAIL. What you said.

PAVLA. Why an aphorism?

MIKHAIL. Damned if I know.

TARAKANOV. A strange man you are, Misha.

MIKHAIL. All humans are strange and defy understanding. You too are strange. You ought to be holding a government job, taking graft —instead you philosophize.

TARAKANOV. I don't need graft. I'm a simple man.

PAVLA. I've heard you have a son?

TARAKANOV. I've renounced him.

PAVLA. Completely? Why?

TARAKANOV. Yes, completely—because he doesn't love Russia.

PAVLA (*with a sigh*). I don't understand.

MIKHAIL. Matvey Ilich doesn't understand anything himself.

ANNA MARKOVNA. How they talk to old people today!

MIKHAIL. The old people admit themselves that they live in a convulsion of ideas. Consequently, they should wait before they start teaching others.

ANNA MARKOVNA. I teach? Get on with you!

Goes off to the veranda. STYOPKA *glances about and slips a few handfuls of sugar into her pocket.*

PAVLA (*disturbed*). Please, don't quarrel! Why do you?

TARAKANOV. Mostly for distraction.

MIKHAIL. That's right.

PAVLA. Sing your song about a girl, Misha.

MIKHAIL. I'm not in the mood.

PAVLA. Oh, please, Misha—

MIKHAIL (*glancing at her*). Well, I must do as my parents tell me—

Tunes up his guitar. TARAKANOV *fills his pipe and lights it. Accompanying himself softly on the guitar,* MIKHAIL *declaims in recitative.*

In a field a girl is strolling,
I don't know who she is.
Is it her my heart's awaiting,
Bewitched with melancholy?

TARAKANOV. Who is the girl?

PAVLA (*with annoyance*). Don't interrupt. It's a dream.

TARAKANOV (*sighing*). Then it's a girl in general. I understand. In that case the thing to do is to get married.

PAVLA. Oh, please, don't interrupt.

During MIKHAIL'S *recitation* MURATOV *has come out on the veranda. He is in riding clothes and carries a whip. Listening to* MIKHAIL, *he screws up his face ironically.*

MURATOV (*coming down into the garden*). What a poetic scene! Making jam, reading sweet verse— How are you, Pavla Nikolayevna? You're getting prettier every day! Greetings, retired preacher of truth and goodness. Hello, Misha—

Greeted with silence, he sits down beside PAVLA—*she edges away from him.* TARAKANOV, *after a silent exchange of nods with* MURATOV, *goes off into the garden, casting sullen glances at the forester.*

I've walked right through the house—not a soul there!

PAVLA. Aunt Sonya is in—

MURATOV. Then I heard the soft sounds of a guitar. Whose verse did you read, Misha, your own?

MIKHAIL. Yes, why?

MURATOV. Rather poor stuff. Still, even that's probably all right for home use.

PAVLA. Shall I call Aunt Sonya?

MIKHAIL (*with a light laugh*). Stay where you are. I'll call her.

PAVLA. Better I—

MURATOV. Why better?

PAVLA. I don't know. Well, let Misha go—

MIKHAIL *goes into the house.* MURATOV *picks up his guitar, and cocks his head toward* PAVLA.

MURATOV. Fine fellows, army clerks. They're brave, and they're expert at paying court to ladies—don't you think so?

PAVLA. I don't know any.

MURATOV. Army clerks and also barbers are very fond of playing the guitar.

PAVLA. Are they?

MURATOV. You make a poor Eve—you lack curiosity. Aren't you interested to know why I've become such a frequent visitor here?

PAVLA (*embarrassed*). No, I'm not interested.

MURATOV. That's a pity. I wish you'd give it some thought.

PAVLA. You're an old acquaintance of Aunt Sonya's—

MURATOV. An old acquaintance I am. But my heart is young and it's

drawn to one who's young, as you're drawn, for example, to Misha, a very stupid fellow—

PAVLA (*aroused*). He's not stupid at all—

MURATOV. I know him better than you do— We always drink together—

PAVLA. And I'm not drawn to him either.

MURATOV (*singing in a low voice*). "O husband old! O husband stern!"

PAVLA (*rising*). That's not true!

MURATOV. What's not true?

PAVLA. Everything! Everything you're saying. And I don't want to listen to you! You deliberately—

MURATOV. Deliberately what?

PAVLA. I don't know how to put it. You make fun of me. (*Hurries away.*)

MURATOV (*taking out his cigarette case, follows her with his eyes, and sighs*). Little fool!

With the tip of his whip MURATOV *strikes lightly on the strings of the guitar.* ANNA MARKOVNA *peers out from around the corner of the veranda and instantly withdraws. Out of the house comes* SOPHIA—*she stops on the upper step of the veranda and takes a deep breath.*

SOPHIA. What a glorious day!

MURATOV (*rising and walking toward her*). It's hot and dusty! How are you?

SOPHIA. What did you do to upset Pavla?

MURATOV. I?

SOPHIA. Don't start play-acting. You know I won't believe you.

MURATOV. She amuses me a great deal.

ANNA MARKOVNA *and* STYOPKA *appear at the outdoor stove.* How soon do you think the idyl will turn into drama?

SOPHIA (*sharply*). Don't talk nonsense! Have you brought the papers at last?

MURATOV. No. My office clerk is terribly lazy.

SOPHIA. You're not any too industrious yourself.

MURATOV. I'm lazy on principle. Why on earth should I toil for savages who are incapable of appreciating my labors?

SOPHIA. You've said that before.

MURATOV. That proves I'm serious.

SOPHIA. And not trying to say something original?

MURATOV. I live among people who are dishonest, lazy, and uncivilized. I don't want to do anything for them—I see no sense to it. I hope I make myself clear?

SOPHIA. Clear enough, but hardly attractive.

ANNA MARKOVNA *takes* STYOPKA *by the ear and leads her away.*

MURATOV. I can't help it. Incidentally, that Hevern of yours—

SOPHIA. Let's not talk about him—

MURATOV. Why not?

SOPHIA. I don't want to.

MURATOV. You don't want *me* to talk about him?

SOPHIA. That's right.

MURATOV. Oh, really? H'm! And I came here partly with the idea of telling you something about that gentleman.

SOPHIA. That gentleman has a name—Gustav Yegorovich. I have great respect for him.

MURATOV. What if he turns out to be a crook?

SOPHIA (*rising, in a firm voice, wrathfully*). What do you want?

MURATOV (*a little frightened*). Will you permit me—

SOPHIA. I've just told you how I regard this man—

MURATOV. But surely you can make a mistake!

SOPHIA. I'll answer for my mistakes myself. Besides I'm just as good as you at sizing up people.

MURATOV. Yet you don't sense my attitude toward you, do you?

SOPHIA. That's not true. (*With a laugh.*) I know you neither believe me, nor respect me—

MURATOV (*with a sigh*). Oh, how mistaken you are!

SOPHIA. Please, no oh's! And I'm not mistaken. You see me as one of the merchant species who had a landowner for a husband and was corrupted and worn out by him—a rich woman and a cunning one, sinful in her thoughts, but cowardly—and stupid too. You're counting on my stupidity when you parade your cynicism before me, aren't you?

MURATOV. I'm no cynic. I'm a skeptic, as all people of intelligence are.

SOPHIA. I well remember your first attempts—when my husband was still alive— (*With a sigh.*) If you'd only known how I needed sympathy then—a concern that was honest.

MURATOV. I treated you with as much honesty as I was capable of.

SOPHIA. Well, you're not capable of much. And I rather liked you then. I believed you were a good man, an intelligent man—

MURATOV. I was less intelligent then than I am now.

SOPHIA. I didn't give in to you, and for a time it kindled your pride, your obstinacy.

MURATOV. Not obstinacy—passion!

SOPHIA. Oh, please! You and passion!

MURATOV. Are we getting into a quarrel?

SOPHIA. I'm sorry. I've been letting myself go—

MURATOV (*bowing*). That's all right. I'm prepared to go on listening to you. We've needed to have some such conversation as this!

SOPHIA. You think so? I agree.

MURATOV (*glancing around*). Well, go ahead.

SOPHIA (*looking at him*). Once I nearly believed you—

MURATOV. When was that?

SOPHIA. It makes no difference to you. (*Rises and walks to and fro.*)

MURATOV (*after a pause*). It would be interesting to know what you think of me.

SOPHIA. Nothing good—I can tell you that.

MURATOV. Well, let's have it. If it cuts to the heart—

SOPHIA. What then?

MURATOV. I don't know. Something will happen.

SOPHIA (*after thinking it over*). You know, I've come to the conclusion that you use your supposed infatuation for me to cover up your laziness, to justify your trivial existence.

MURATOV. Not bad for an opening—

SOPHIA. You're a very dishonest man—

MURATOV (*rises, smiling*). Now, that's really—

SOPHIA (*coming close to him*). Yes, a dishonest man. An honest man wouldn't use everything without paying for what he takes—

MURATOV. I don't recall taking anything from you—

SOPHIA. They say you're strict in applying the law. I believe you prosecute people only because you don't like people—because they bore you, and you take out your boredom on them with petty, bitter spite. You use the power that's been given you like a drunkard, or like my late husband who was a sick man— I can't speak well and the words that come to my tongue seem foreign to me— But I feel everything clearly and I'll tell you candidly—I feel very sorry for you—

MURATOV. I offer no thanks—

SOPHIA. You live terribly—

MURATOV. Do I?

SOPHIA. You love nobody and nothing—

MURATOV. That's true. I don't like people—

SOPHIA. You don't love your work either.

MURATOV. Nor my work. Preserve forests? No, that doesn't excite me. Next?

SOPHIA. But that's what you studied—to preserve forests.

MURATOV. I certainly did.

SOPHIA. How do you explain it then!

MURATOV. I made a mistake—the usual Russian mistake. The thing a Russian craves first of all is to get away from his native surroundings. Where he'll go and how he'll get there is immaterial. But that's what we Russians are: take it or leave it. Well, have you said all you wanted to say?

SOPHIA. Yes.

MURATOV. What's the conclusion?

SOPHIA. You can draw it yourself.

MURATOV. Perhaps you hope that after this philosophical argument I'll shoot myself? No, I won't. There are thousands of people like me, and life is our dish, madam. People like you can be counted on the

fingers of one hand—and in this life you're completely superfluous. You can't even figure out what to do with yourselves. Formerly you usually took to revolution, but nobody needs a revolution today—so you can draw the moral yourself.

SOPHIA (*smiling*). I seem to have cut you to the heart, after all.

MURATOV. To the heart? No.

SOPHIA. But we're through with our argument?

MURATOV (*frowning at her*). You're cleverer than I thought. I'm surprised you're able to put up with all this—this vulgarity around you. (*Sighs.*) Still, there's something in my heart that impels me toward you—

SOPHIA. It's of no use either to you or to me—

MURATOV. Your way of looking at people is much too simple, madam, much too elementary!

SOPHIA (*heatedly*). Oh, please, no more of that complexity of yours. You ought to be ashamed of it. It's nothing but a screen for your lying and licentiousness.

MURATOV. You're losing your temper? Then I'm off. I like being angry myself. But it gives me little pleasure to see another person, particularly a woman, delight in pouring out ill temper. (*Goes off to the house unhurriedly, pausing on the veranda steps.*) In spite of everything I don't regard this as a quarrel—if you don't mind?

SOPHIA (*in a low voice*). As you please.

MURATOV. I don't then. And so until our next meeting, a more pleasant one for me, I trust.

Goes off. Alone in the garden, SOPHIA *moves about shrugging and smiling. From around the corner* STYOPKA *appears.*

STYOPKA. Sophia Ivanovna, Grandma has boxed my ears—

SOPHIA (*without looking at the girl*). What did you do?

STYOPKA. I took a little sugar—

SOPHIA. You should have asked permission—

STYOPKA. She would never have given it to me.

SOPHIA. You should have asked me.

STYOPKA. You were out.

SOPHIA. You should have waited until I returned.

STYOPKA. I might have done that. I'm a fool.

SOPHIA (*stroking her head*). You are a little fool.

STYOPKA. When shall I be clever?

SOPHIA. In due time. Have patience. Somebody's driven up. Go see who it is.

STYOPKA (*running*). Look—it's your German!

SOPHIA (*smiles and peeps around the corner of the veranda*). Anna Markovna, why are you hiding?

ANNA MARKOVNA (*coming out*). You were talking here—and my jam got boiling over. You pet that girl too much—she steals sugar—

PAVLA *appears on the veranda.*

PAVLA. Aunt Sonya, there's somebody to see you.

SOPHIA. I know, I'm coming. Why so sad?

PAVLA. Misha was telling about his school days—

ANNA MARKOVNA. Oh-ho!

SOPHIA. I must have a cold snack ready. (*Goes into the house.*)

ANNA MARKOVNA. I begin to feel sorry, Pasha dear, we sold our little house.

PAVLA. Oh, it's nothing, Mother.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Having one's own home is always something. (*Lowering her voice.*) Sophia raked the forester over the coals here. Such a brave woman. She must have made up her mind to marry the German—

PAVLA (*reflectively*). She's awfully nice—

ANNA MARKOVNA. They're all nice—for themselves! And you, Pasha —you shouldn't spend so much time with Mikhail—

PAVLA. Stop it, Mother. Why do you keep harping on it? It's so boring. You've become spiteful. Who are you vexed with? I really can't understand it.

ANNA MARKOVNA. There, there. You'd better look at yourself—see what you've come to look like now.

She disappears around the corner. PAVLA *pushes the guitar away irritably.* SHOKHIN, *holding a package, comes down from the veranda.*

PAVLA. Who is it you want?

SHOKHIN. No one. I've brought sugar.

PAVLA. Are you Shokhin?

SHOKHIN. That's right, Shokhin, the head forest warden.

PAVLA (*in a low voice*). Did you kill a man?

SHOKHIN (*not immediately*). Y-yes.

PAVLA. Oh, God! You poor soul—

SHOKHIN (*quietly*). I was acquitted.

PAVLA. Does it make any difference? You wouldn't acquit yourself before your own conscience, would you? How did you—

SHOKHIN. With an ax—the butt end—

PAVLA. Merciful God! I'm not asking about that—

SHOKHIN. Well—where shall I put this? (*Places the package on the table, and bursts out sharply and hurriedly.*) You know what they did in 1907? They would come to the forest and begin cutting down trees—

PAVLA. And you went after them?

SHOKHIN. That's what I was hired for.

PAVLA. Oh, my God! How can anybody kill people for that?

SHOKHIN. They've been killed for less—

PAVLA (*gazes at him and calls out in a pitiful, childish voice*). Mother!

SHOKHIN (*hurt, in a low voice*). There's no call for that! I mean no harm—

There is a noise in the house. SHOKHIN *glances around, and runs off. Enter* ANTIPA, *covered with dust and looking tired.*

ANTIPA (*glancing around*). Who ran away?

PAVLA. Shokhin—

ANTIPA. Why?

PAVLA. I don't know.

ANTIPA. Where's Mikhail?

PAVLA. In his room, I suppose—

ANTIPA (*comes down the steps and puts an arm around her shoulders*). Why looking so sad?

PAVLA. It's that Shokhin—

ANTIPA. What do you mean?

PAVLA. He killed a man—

ANTIPA (*gloomily*). Yes, so he did—the fool! I hired a lawyer for him, got him off— Now he's as loyal to me as a dog. But if you want, I can fire him—

PAVLA. Oh, no! He'll do the same thing to me—

ANTIPA. Don't be silly.

PAVLA. Or somebody else— No, don't fire him.

ANTIPA. Oh, well. God, I look at you—and big words begin to stir in my heart—but I don't know how to speak them. If you'd only understand—without words!

PAVLA (*diffidently*). I will—if you wait—

ANTIPA. I'm waiting. (*After a sigh.*) Mind though. I haven't too much time. I live in a hurry and I like everything to open to me at once.

PAVLA. They're saying that you've changed—

ANTIPA (*sullenly*). I? How have I changed? For what reason?

PAVLA. I don't know the reason—

ANTIPA. Who was saying that?

PAVLA. People.

ANTIPA (*scornfully*). People! (*Whistles.*)

PAVLA. They say you're neglecting your business—

ANTIPA. It's my business. I neglect it or not as I please. (*Looks intently at her and puts his arm around her.*) It's odd to hear it from you—a mere child, but you must talk about business!

PAVLA (*quietly, as she glances around*). And they also say that Aunt Sonya is getting the whole business into her hands—

ANTIPA (*flaring up, angrily*). If I find out who says this, I'll break his neck. And don't you repeat these filthy stories—those are my orders —you hear me? Nobody will make me quarrel with my sister—not a chance! (*Gives her a slight push.*) Imagine, the gall of these people!

PAVLA (*her feelings hurt, walks off slowly*). There you go—losing

your temper— And you yourself say: Talk to me about everything you think—

ANTIPA (*grabs her by the shoulder*). Wait. Of course I want you to talk to me, talk about everything. You mustn't be offended with me. I was just annoyed. But you talk—only talk about your own ideas, not what other people say. They speak mostly from spite and envy. People are weak and miserable—that's why they're envious—

PAVLA. Misha is weak, but he's not spiteful or envious—

ANTIPA (*recoiling from her*). What's that? Why do you talk about him?

PAVLA. Because what you say about people is not true.

ANTIPA. Not true? Because my son is not— H'm, it's strange how one thing leads to another—

PAVLA (*uneasily*). You mustn't think, please—

ANTIPA (*fixing her with his eyes, hurriedly*). Think what?

PAVLA (*embarrassed*). What you talked about last Thursday. I'm not the least bit interested in him—

ANTIPA (*embracing her again and looking in her eyes*). I didn't mean that, I swear to God! I believe you. You gave me your answer, and that's that—thank you! I love you, Pavla—I love you so, with such force, it almost chokes me. Let's go to the pond—let's, I'll kiss you there—

PAVLA (*in a low voice*). Oh, not in the daytime. It's not nice—

ANTIPA (*leading her away*). It will be nice! Come on, my dear—come on—my precious star from heaven—

They go off. HEVERN *steps out onto the veranda and follows them with screwed-up eyes.* STYOPKA *brings a silver pail with ice and wine bottles.* SOPHIA *comes out last.*

SOPHIA. Well, go ahead—

HEVERN. You're in too gay a mood today, and it disconcerts me.

SOPHIA. Really? Do you like melancholy women better?

HEVERN. You know whom I like—

SOPHIA (*smiling*). If you had more money, I'd be more serious toward you—if you don't mind my saying so.

HEVERN (*with a slightly wry face*). It's a very valuable trait you have—always to speak frankly. But I shall have more money. I'm already rich. I understand well that nowhere is it so necessary to be rich as in Russia, where only money gives one independence and esteem. And I know that at forty I shall have one hundred thousand rubles. I am thirty-four now.

SOPHIA. You bring too much arithmetic into life.

HEVERN. Oh, that's necessary. One has to be able to count if only so that at fifty one doesn't marry a girl of twenty. That can never be a true match and can only do harm to one's business.

SOPHIA (*coldly*). You think so?

HEVERN. I'm sure of it. Late marriages in Russia are always unsuc-

cessful. When a man is in a hurry to get home, his business suffers; his impatience may also affect the interests of third parties.

SOPHIA. Such as mine, for instance.

HEVERN. Yours too. As well as mine—

MIKHAIL *comes out. He shakes hands with* HEVERN, *pours himself a glass of wine, seats himself on the upper step and studies the wine against the light.* HEVERN *looks at him from above, while* SOPHIA, *smoking, watches* HEVERN.

HEVERN. Did you try to catch perch this morning, Misha?

MIKHAIL. I did.

HEVERN. And were you successful?

MIKHAIL. I was.

HEVERN. How many did you catch?

MIKHAIL. One.

HEVERN. Was it big?

MIKHAIL. About a pound.

HEVERN. That's bad. Nothing takes up so much time as fishing. (*To* SOPHIA.) Yesterday I talked with your marshal of nobility. He's a very strange character.

SOPHIA. Is he? In what way?

HEVERN. Yes, he's a very strange character. He's been to other countries, is interested in art, has visited museums, and not once did he go to the Reichstag! He doesn't understand that socialism is a historical phenomenon, and laughs at what should be studied. The bare instinct of an individualist property owner cannot defeat socialism by its own force. To wage war successfully, you must know your enemy.

SOPHIA. Yes, it's necessary to know the strong and the weak points of the enemy. But I'm not interested in socialism either.

HEVERN. Oh, it's not essential for a woman! Yes, a strange man, this marshal of nobility. He spoke of the honest services of the nobility on behalf of Russia with such fire—so beautifully. But if you offer him two and a half thousand rubles, he will put his conscience in his pocket—

SOPHIA (*laughing*). Why exactly two and a half thousand?

HEVERN. Just an example.

SOPHIA. Did you offer that?

HEVERN (*in a forbidding tone*). No, what for? (*To* MIKHAIL.) You live as friends with Pavla Nikolayevna, don't you?

MIKHAIL. She's a fine woman, honest and kind—

HEVERN. Is she? That's very nice. But many Russians, it seems to me, are kind only because they're weak in character—isn't that so?

MIKHAIL. I don't know. You can judge it better as a foreigner.

ANTIPA *and* PAVLA *are approaching through the garden. They walk apart, looking subdued. Noticing them, the others remain silent.*

ANTIPA (*looking out of sorts and grumbling*). When the heart doesn't flame but only smoulders, that's not yet real life. Don't you be too rash with your thinking—

PAVLA (*wearily*). One moment you say I'm stupid, another, I mustn't think—

ANTIPA (*with annoyance*). Don't you understand? I'm talking about different things— (*Noticing* MIKHAIL, *draws himself up and asks in a sharp tone.*) Is the report ready?

MIKHAIL. Not yet.

ANTIPA. Why not? Didn't I tell you—

MIKHAIL. The accounts for the summer house haven't come in yet.

ANTIPA. They haven't come in? That's a lie.

SOPHIA. Don't shout. I have the accounts. They have to be checked—

ANTIPA (*coming onto the veranda*). You always defend others—when it's not necessary. If they have to be checked, why doesn't he do it himself?

SOPHIA *whispers something to him sternly, to which he answers with a growl.*

HEVERN (*to* PAVLA). How are you?

PAVLA. I'm quite well, thank you.

HEVERN. I'm very glad.

PAVLA. Are you serious?

HEVERN. About what?

PAVLA. Are you genuinely glad when people are well?

HEVERN (*surprised*). Of course! Certainly. How else can I be? When everybody around me is well, I benefit by it—

PAVLA. How simple and true that is—

HEVERN. I love everything simple. It's simple things that are true!

ANTIPA (*to* HEVERN). Let's go look at the plan—

HEVERN. Certainly.

ANTIPA. You come with us, Mikhail—come on. We've bought the marshal's forest, Sophia—you know about it, don't you?

SOPHIA. No, I don't.

ANTIPA (*to* HEVERN). Why didn't you inform our lady partner?

HEVERN (*frowning*). I was sure—

SOPHIA (*to* ANTIPA). How much?

ANTIPA. Twenty-three—

SOPHIA. You didn't want to pay more than eighteen.

ANTIPA. I didn't want to, but I had to.

SOPHIA. Why?

ANTIPA. A new competitor turned up. I'll tell you more later. Let's go. Come along, Mikhail.

They go off, with HEVERN *bringing up the rear. Smoking thoughtfully,* SOPHIA *follows* HEVERN *with her eyes.* PAVLA *leans against the railing, her head bowed.*

SOPHIA. What makes you so sad?

PAVLA. I'm tired.

SOPHIA. What did you talk about?

PAVLA. The same as always— He keeps saying how much he loves me—as if I didn't know. But he goes on and on—

SOPHIA. Come over here, you—guileless soul!

PAVLA. No, really. Suppose I do love—but one can't talk about it all the time.

SOPHIA (*sadly*). It's very bad, my child, if one can't talk about it all the time.

PAVLA. And the men are all alike. How strangely he looks at you!

SOPHIA. Who?

PAVLA. Gustav Yegorovich.

SOPHIA. Oh, he! That's the way he looks at everything. The true manager!

PAVLA. Do you like him?

SOPHIA. He's all right—a strong gentleman. He ought to be a good traveling companion—you could never miss a train with him along.

PAVLA. I don't understand. Are you joking?

SOPHIA. You don't understand many things, my friend—

PAVLA (*sorrowfully*). That must be so. Nothing is turning out as I expected.

SOPHIA. Tell me—why did you marry my brother?

PAVLA. I thought it would be different. You see, I'm terribly frightened of everything—always afraid something may happen. Until I was twelve Father had me scared. Then, five years in the convent. There, too, everybody lives in fear. At first we feared being robbed. During the disturbances we had Cossacks stationed with us, and they kept whistling every night. They used to get drunk and sing loud songs. They didn't show any respect for the nuns, and things weren't at all nice. Everybody broke the rules, and was bitter, and afraid of everybody else—of God, too, instead of loving him. So I said to myself —I must get myself under somebody's strong arm—I won't be able to live alone according to my own lights—

SOPHIA (*reflectively*). Did you think Antipa was strong?

PAVLA. He said he was. Misha doesn't care for anything or anybody —he's a stranger to us all. And those who wanted to marry me before him—they were all after money—

SOPHIA (*caressing her*). And I thought badly of you at first—do you remember, Pavla?

PAVLA. Yes. But I don't like anything bad—I'm afraid of it. You used to look at me with such forbidding eyes, I hid in the corners and cried. I wanted to come and say to you: I'm not bad, I'm not greedy, but I didn't have the courage.

SOPHIA. You poor little girl. May God be with you! You'll find it hard—

PAVLA. I already find it hard. There's that Shokhin always around. He killed a man, and goes about as if it were nothing!

SOPHIA. Don't worry about him. He's no villain—he's a sufferer.

PAVLA. And I hoped to live quietly, with everybody around me kind and smiling, believing that I wished evil to nobody—

SOPHIA. That they will not believe—no.

PAVLA. But why won't they?

SOPHIA (*rises and moves about*). Just they won't believe it. You said it well—with everybody smiling—

PAVLA. As before a festival—you've done everything, you're tired and ready, and are waiting for the holy day with quiet joy.

SOPHIA. The festival is still a long way off, my dear, and there's little that's ready for it.

PAVLA. Oh, God! Aunt Sonya, teach me—

SOPHIA. What?

PAVLA. Teach me how to live better with people.

SOPHIA. I don't know how myself. Life goes by in trivialities, as if in a mist—

PAVLA. What's your heart's desire?

SOPHIA. Mine? (*She pauses, then speaks in a low voice, with great force.*) I want to let loose, go wild, commit all sins, break all rules, muss everything up. Then, after rising above all men, I'll throw myself at their feet: Listen to me, dear people, I'll say, I'm not your ruler—I'm only a low sinner—lower than anybody—and there are no rulers over you, nor do you need any rulers—

PAVLA (*in a quiet frightened tone*). Why that? What's the reason for it?

SOPHIA. So that people be freed of fear before one another. There's nobody to fear today. Yet everybody's frightened, dejected—everybody lives in fear. You see it yourself. Nobody has the courage to say what he means to the last syllable.

ANTIPA *appears at the door and stands listening.*

PAVLA. I don't understand it. Won't you ruin yourself that way?

SOPHIA. God ruined himself for the sake of man, Shokhin's father used to say.

ANTIPA. What's all this about?

PAVLA. Oh!

ANTIPA (*coming up to her in a hurt tone*). What's frightened you? If you're not guilty, you've nothing to fear. What were you discussing?

PAVLA. Oh, various things.

ANTIPA (*to* SOPHIA, *somewhat bluntly*). You should talk less.

SOPHIA *moves about without looking at him, hiding her excitement.*

PAVLA (*caressingly*). You should shout less. You always shout—there's no need of that—

ANTIPA (*softly*). That's not because of bad temper—it's just that I

have a big voice. It'd be a good thing to have some tea, mistress, eh? Go fix it. Tell them to bring it here. And something sweet too. Run along, dear. (PAVLA *goes in. After watching her out of sight,* ANTIPA *turns to his sister with resentment in his voice.*) You're spoiling her for me— (SOPHIA *walks past him in silence. He repeats insistently.*) You're spoiling my wife for me, I say.

SOPHIA (*suddenly, sharply*). Shut up.

ANTIPA (*recoiling*). Say—what's the matter?

SOPHIA. Well, do you find it restful and enjoyable to have a young wife?

ANTIPA (*slumping into a chair, quietly*). Has she been complaining?

SOPHIA (*recovering her self-control*). No. I assure you she hasn't. You must forgive me. I'm in a bad mood. Something's troubling me. Please forgive me.

ANTIPA (*quietly*). You frightened me. Lord have mercy on us! I love her so much—I can't tell you how much!

SOPHIA (*again moving about*). You're not any happier for it—neither you, nor she.

ANTIPA. Well—just wait a while! (*After a pause.*) Sonya!

SOPHIA. Yes?

ANTIPA. Tell me—how is she with Mikhail? Anything between them?

SOPHIA (*stopping in front of him*). Get that right out of your head—hear me? And don't encourage the thought in yourself or in anybody else? Where's Hevern?

ANTIPA (*waving his hand*). In there—up to his ears in plans. To the devil with him— I'm tired of him.

SOPHIA. You're becoming much too profitable a partner for him.

ANTIPA (*on the alert*). How so?

SOPHIA. Just so. Keep your eyes open.

ANTIPA (*smiling broadly*). Oh, that? And I thought something had gone wrong between you and him—

SOPHIA. You think what you shouldn't.

ANTIPA (*sighing*). You're hard to make out, Sonya.

SOPHIA. And you mustn't shout at Mikhail in Pavla's presence—understand?

ANTIPA. Well, well. The boy gets on my nerves—too much. What does he live for?

SOPHIA. You think about yourself.

ANTIPA (*reflectively*). I won't harm Pavla.

SOPHIA. Don't make fun of her mother.

ANTIPA. I dislike that woman.

SOPHIA (*supporting herself against the railing*). I feel tired—

ANTIPA (*jumps to his feet and hurries to her*). Anything wrong? Shall I get you some water?

SOPHIA (*leaning on him*). I'm not feeling well—

ANTIPA. Why? Good God! What's the matter, Sonya?

SOPHIA. Wait— Oh, my Lord—

ANTIPA (*putting his arms around her*). Ah, my clever little girl! Come, lie down, rest—

He leads her away. TARAKANOV *strolls on from the garden as* MIKHAIL, *appearing on the veranda, comes down to the table and pours himself some wine.*

TARAKANOV. Is the German gone?

MIKHAIL. He's a Swede—or a Greek.

TARAKANOV. It's the same thing, a stranger. Is he gone?

MIKHAIL. He's staying for supper.

TARAKANOV. H'm! It's amazing!

MIKHAIL. What is?

TARAKANOV. Doesn't anybody notice he smells like a crook?

MIKHAIL. Oh, well— With you everybody's a crook.

TARAKANOV. Not everybody, but half the people are. Where's Sophia Ivanovna? She sees everything.

MIKHAIL. I don't know—I really don't know.

MIKHAIL *sits down on the steps and lights a cigarette.* TARAKANOV *goes off, mumbling to himself and gesticulating.* PAVLA *comes out of the house. Smiling, she stops behind* MIKHAIL *and tickles his neck with the end of her scarf.* MIKHAIL *speaks without turning to look at her.*

Look out. If Father sees this, there'll be trouble.

PAVLA (*with a grimace*). I can't even tease. I'm young and I'm bored—

MIKHAIL. Everybody's bored.

PAVLA. There must be a gay life somewhere.

MIKHAIL. Try and find it.

PAVLA. Let's go into the garden.

MIKHAIL. I have to get back to the office. I'll finish my cigarette and in I go to earn my bread with the sweat of my brow—

PAVLA (*coming down the steps*). Then I'll go alone. I'll set off like this and walk on and on for a week or a month. Good-by. Will you be sorry for me?

MIKHAIL. I've been sorry for you for a long time.

PAVLA. That's not true. I don't believe you. (*Goes off. Looking back, shakes her finger at him.*) That's not true.

MIKHAIL *follows her broodingly with his eyes, puts out his cigarette, and rises. Standing behind him is his father.*

ANTIPA. Where are you going?

MIKHAIL. To the office.

ANTIPA. What did she mean by saying "That's not true"?

MIKHAIL. I don't know. I didn't catch it.

ANTIPA. You didn't? (*Frowns at his son, as if about to say something, but instead dismisses him with a wave of his hand.*) Run along.

Hunched over, he slowly walks after PAVLA. ANNA MARKOVNA *peers from around the corner and shakes her fists at him.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

SOPHIA'S *study and office—a large room with a big desk, a fireplace right, and two doors left, one door leading to* SOPHIA'S *bedroom, the other to the inner rooms. In the back wall there are two windows and a door opening out onto the veranda.*

SOPHIA, *holding some papers, is standing at the desk.* MURATOV, *about to leave, is flicking a shabby old hat against his leg.*

A gray autumn day looks in the windows through the swaying bare branches of trees.

SOPHIA (*with an air of absorption*). One more question.

MURATOV (*inclining his head*). A dozen, if you like.

SOPHIA. Tell me simply and frankly—what's prompted you to collect these papers?

MURATOV. My sentiment—

SOPHIA. We'll leave sentiment out of it.

MURATOV. What am I to tell you then? (*Shrugs and chuckles.*) You're so sharp with me I can hardly stand it. I didn't even say what sentiment—

SOPHIA. Jealousy?

MURATOV. It may surprise you, no!

SOPHIA. A desire to annoy me?

MURATOV. Not that either. I'm afraid I can't explain it without making you angry with me. (*After a pause.*) No, you won't understand it. I don't quite understand it myself.

SOPHIA. Suppose you try.

MURATOV (*sighing*). Well, there's a difference of opinion between us, isn't there? (*She nods, watching him closely.*) These papers are proof of the fact that I'm right and you're wrong.

SOPHIA (*with a sigh*). An evasive answer.

MURATOV. Permit me to take my leave.

SOPHIA (*looking him over*). Good-by. Why are you so lightly dressed? There's a strong wind, and it's likely to rain.

MURATOV (*laughing softly*). Don't worry.

SOPHIA. Why do you laugh?

MURATOV. I've a reason—I have, my lady. Well, I'm going.

SOPHIA. Excuse my not seeing you off. You'll be stopping at the office? Please send Tarakanov over.

MURATOV goes out. SOPHIA throws the papers on the desk, wipes her hands with a handkerchief, and presses her fingers to her eyes. ANTIPA enters through the garden door. He looks unhealthy, disheveled, wears a heavy jacket without a waistcoat, his shirt collar is unbuttoned, and his feet are in felt slippers. SOPHIA flares up. You should have asked whether you could come in.

ANTIPA (*indifferently*). Where do you get that? I'm no stranger.

SOPHIA. What do you want?

ANTIPA. Nothing. *(Looks around.)*

SOPHIA (*scrutinizing him. In a softer tone*). What's the idea of running around all mussed up like that?

ANTIPA (*lowering himself into a chair by the fireplace*). When I'm dead you'll dress me up.

SOPHIA. What on earth—

ANTIPA. I don't like these genteel old houses. They're not houses, they're coffins. They even have a peculiar odor of their own. I made a mistake in moving over to your place. I've cut myself off from everything.

SOPHIA. Stop it, please. I've no time to listen to such nonsense.

Enter TARAKANOV. SOPHIA *hands him a fat file from her desk.* Matvey Ilich, take out all accounts for the summer house and the Usek Company, please. Do it here right away—

She sits down at the desk and writes. TARAKANOV *makes room for himself at a little table by the fireplace and puts on his spectacles.* ANTIPA *watches him with a smile.*

ANTIPA. What do the newspapers have to say?

TARAKANOV. China's taking up arms—

ANTIPA. Against whom?

TARAKANOV. Against us, at the instigation of the Germans.

ANTIPA. You have no love for the Germans, eh?

TARAKANOV. None at all.

ANTIPA. Why not?

TARAKANOV. Because they're more clever than we are.

ANTIPA. One should respect clever people.

TARAKANOV. I do. But I don't like them.

ANTIPA. You're a queer fellow.

TARAKANOV. In Russia everybody who has intelligence is queer.

ANTIPA. You're probably right there. (*After a pause.*) Although you don't have much intelligence either, but you're queer all the same.

TARAKANOV. That's not true.

ANTIPA. Isn't it? Why did you take off your uniform, give up your job?

TARAKANOV. I've been explaining that to you—

ANTIPA. You've been explaining all right, but you never explained it.

TARAKANOV. It is said, turn away from evil and you'll create good—

ANTIPA (*striking the arm of his chair with his hand*). Fiddlesticks! Turning away from evil you'll create nothing! No, you have to step right into the evil, strike at its heart, knock it down, trample on it, destroy it root and branch, and not give in to it, let it get the upper hand of you. That's what you must do! Am I right, Sophia?

SOPHIA. You are. But you're interrupting me.

TARAKANOV. That's mere shouting, words, drum-beating. You wait until some evil comes down on you with all its weight—you'll be doing your uttermost to break away from it.

ANTIPA. I? Not likely. I'm not that sort. I know what our life is—it's a fist fight. No, I won't run away.

TARAKANOV. We'll see.

STYOPKA *peers into the room from the doorway left.*

STYOPKA. Antipa Ivanovich, the peasants have come.

ANTIPA. What peasants?

STYOPKA. From Kamenskoye.

ANTIPA. I'll show those scoundrels!

SOPHIA. Not so fast. It's not their fault. I know it was Hevern's orders—

ANTIPA. His orders? Are you sure?

SOPHIA. I'm telling you.

ANTIPA (*going off*). The addleheaded German.

TARAKANOV. Less addleheaded than any of us.

STYOPKA. Give me something to read, Sophia Ivanovna.

SOPHIA. Ask Misha.

STYOPKA. He chased me away. He's singing right into the young mistress' ear—

SOPHIA. What's that?

STYOPKA. They're sitting side by side on the sofa and he's singing a song to her.

SOPHIA. Well, you run along. And don't prattle about trivial things.

STYOPKA. I've spoken only to you. (*She goes off.*)

TARAKANOV (*muttering to himself*). The young mistress. What sort of mistress is she?

SOPHIA. How long have you known Muratov?

TARAKANOV. I? About ten years.

SOPHIA. And what do you think of him?

TARAKANOV (*looking at her over his spectacles*). In the early days I thought quite well of him. He got up many useful things in his line, that's forestry, such as new plantings and that sort of thing. He allowed peasants to collect brushwood, and cleared and drained a lot of forest land. Then, suddenly, it was as if something knocked him on the head —and he's become a most unpleasant character. Our men are like

that—as if made of straw—they flare up and burn with lots of smoke, but give off neither light nor warmth.

SOPHIA (*listening attentively, her elbows on the desk*). What is it you find so unpleasant about him?

TARAKANOV. What do I find? The same as everybody else does. He has no love for anybody, ruffles everybody's temper, sets one person against another, tells tales. Also is rather loose as regards women. Yet he's a clever man—that's the strange part of it— *Enter* PAVLA.

PAVLA. May I come in?

SOPHIA. Of course.

PAVLA. It's cold everywhere.

SOPHIA. Order them to make a fire.

TARAKANOV (*handing over a bunch of papers*). Here are the papers. May I go?

SOPHIA. Thank you. On your way send me Styopka, please. And Misha, too. TARAKANOV *goes off.*

PAVLA. Why all dressed up?

SOPHIA. I'm expecting a visitor.

PAVLA. Well, Misha's written another poem.

SOPHIA. Any good?

PAVLA. Yes. It's about pine trees.

SOPHIA. Has he been drinking?

PAVLA (*with a sigh*). Since morning.

ANNA MARKOVNA *appears at the door.*

ANNA MARKOVNA. Naturally, the boy has to drink himself unconscious.

SOPHIA. Why has he?

ANNA MARKOVNA. Because he's been wronged.

SOPHIA. Countless people are wronged.

ANNA MARKOVNA. And they all drink. What do you think makes people drink? Your own father drank because he was wronged. He was clever, but nobody recognized that. So he began to prove his cleverness by playing rough tricks on others, just as the forester has been doing. Of course, they took him to court, but it only made him more vicious. How much does a man need? A man's soul is like a child's, it's ever so touchy— Oh, what did I come here for? Oh, yes. Did you give Styopka a yellow ribbon, Sophia Ivanovna?

SOPHIA. Yes, why?

ANNA MARKOVNA. Then it's all right. You see, she stuck the ribbon in her mop and made eyes at herself in the mirror.

PAVLA. Mother, stop that.

ANNA MARKOVNA. What do I care? All I say is—you must guard other people's things even more than your own. *Enter* STYOPKA. Here she is, our beauty—

STYOPKA. Did you call me?

ANNA MARKOVNA (*going off*). Of course they called you. What's life without you?

SOPHIA. Light the fire, child.

STYOPKA (*running off*). Lord, how the old lady hates me—she has an awful temper!

SOPHIA. A delightful girl—

PAVLA. The only gay spirit in the house. Only she's terribly forward.

SOPHIA (*walking over to* PAVLA). You should ask Antipa to take you to Moscow.

PAVLA. What for?

SOPHIA. You'll see life in a big city.

PAVLA (*indifferently*). All right, I'll ask him.

SOPHIA (*placing her hand on* PAVLA'S *head*). You have no desire to go there?

MIKHAIL *comes in from the inner rooms, looks at them, and slips quietly into a chair. Almost screened by a drape, he sits there drowsing.*

PAVLA. No. I'd like to fall asleep for a year or two, and when I wake up see everything changed—

SOPHIA. That's childish, Pavla. You have to learn how to build your own life. You can't wait for others to take care of your needs.

PAVLA. Please don't be angry with me.

SOPHIA. You're young and have a kind heart. Are you sorry for other people, is that it?

PAVLA. I know what you want to say. But really, Misha doesn't stir any feeling in me at all. I only like listening to him.

SOPHIA (*starting back in surprise*). I wasn't talking about that. But now that you've raised the subject, I must say this to you—you're not behaving yourself with him. He's not a child, and it may end badly for you.

PAVLA. But I'm so bored, and he's so amusing. What am I to do?

SOPHIA. Go away with Antipa, and I'll take care of Mikhail myself.

PAVLA. Perhaps it'll be better if I go with Mother?

SOPHIA. You find it hard being with your husband?

Without answering, PAVLA *presses herself close to the older woman.* SOPHIA *lifts the girl's head and gazes into her eyes.*

I understand you, dear. I told you I also had a husband—

STYOPKA *rushes in.*

STYOPKA. Sophia Ivanovna! The German has arrived. He looks gorgeous!

SOPHIA. There— (*Passing her hand over* PAVLA'S *face.*) Now then, please leave me alone with him, Pavla—

PAVLA (*jumping to her feet*). Oh, God, how I wish you—

SOPHIA. Thank you, dear. Ask him to come in, Styopka.

As PAVLA *goes off,* SOPHIA *covers the papers on the desk with a*

book, touches up her hair before the mirror, and then notices MIKHAIL *sitting in a chair.*

Misha! Have you been here long?

MIKHAIL. Yes.

SOPHIA. Did you hear what we said?

MIKHAIL. I heard something. The German has arrived. The nun was making up something.

SOPHIA. Making up?

MIKHAIL. Yes, of course. She's always making things up. She still lives as if she were playing with dolls. I'm a doll to her, and so is Father, and you. She'll be like that all her life—

SOPHIA. You know, there's probably truth in what you say.

MIKHAIL. Why did you want to see me?

SOPHIA. That's off for the present. You go now. I'll call later.

MIKHAIL (*rising*). Fine. You marry this German, Auntie, and send us all packing to hell—all of us including the romantic papa with his second youth—

SOPHIA. Do go, please.

MIKHAIL. Sh-sh! You must be in complete command of your feelings— (*To* HEVERN, *who appears at the door.*) Welcome, you bearer of civilization and culture!

HEVERN *shakes hands with* MIKHAIL *silently, whereupon* MIKHAIL *goes off.* HEVERN *kisses* SOPHIA'S *hand and follows her to the desk.*

HEVERN (*he is attired in elegant formal dress with a diamond stickpin and diamond ring*). You probably guess why I asked you to receive me today.

SOPHIA (*sitting down*). I believe I do.

HEVERN. It's very gratifying to me.

SOPHIA. Yes?

HEVERN. It makes so many explanations unnecessary. May I smoke?

SOPHIA. Certainly. (*Moves an ashtray and matches toward him.*)

HEVERN. I'm a little excited—

SOPHIA. Will you have some water?

HEVERN. No, thank you. My excitement is natural under the circumstances.

SOPHIA. You have quite an impressive look today.

HEVERN. I wish my thoughts impressed you enough to win your confidence.

SOPHIA. Well, perhaps you'll tell me what they are.

HEVERN. That's precisely the object of my visit. (*Lights his cigar.*) You know I have great respect for your ideas—they match my aims perfectly.

SOPHIA. I'm flattered to hear it.

HEVERN (*bowing*). Yes. I'm quite sincere. You'll not deny me a knowledge of Russia and Russian people, of course— I'm a good observer, I've lived among Russians for eighteen years and I've studied

them well. My conclusion is this—Russia suffers first of all from a lack of healthy people capable of pursuing clearly defined aims. Do you agree?

SOPHIA. Go on.

HEVERN. Yes, you have few people confident of themselves, of their powers. You have too much metaphysics, too little mathematics—

SOPHIA. As you've said many times before.

HEVERN. That's what I think! Now let's take you. You are a woman of intelligence and character.

SOPHIA. Thank you.

HEVERN. It's true. I even think of you allegorically—Sophia Ivanovna is the new, spiritually healthy Russia who, under conditions worthy of her, can perform any task, can do a great amount of cultural work.

SOPHIA. You're overloading me with praise.

HEVERN. I'm perfectly serious. Hence, the alliance with me which I'm proposing has a profound meaning. It's much more than a simple marriage. My energy and yours—why, it'll be colossal. When two strong personalities realize their aims—it's very important. Especially so for Russia in these days when, dismissing all those—dreams, she must at last turn to the simple business of life and get her feet firmly on the ground. Your brother is absorbed in his family life and neglects his business, as I've had occasion to point out to you more than once, in order to protect your interests—

SOPHIA. Is this your first declaration of love?

HEVERN (*somewhat taken aback*). Pardon me—this is something different. I've spoken to you about my sentiments four times already.

SOPHIA. Four times? Are you sure?

HEVERN. I am. I remember the occasions. The first time it was in the garden of the marshal of nobility, at his birthday party—it rained and you got your feet wet. The second time it was in this place, on a bench by the pond. You discomfited me then by saying jocularly that frogs too croak about love.

SOPHIA. I remember the third and fourth occasions.

HEVERN. Of course, it's true about frogs, but if I may say so it was not an appropriate joke. When a man's heart craves—

SOPHIA. Let's end this conversation, Gustav Yegorovich.

HEVERN (*startled*). Why?

SOPHIA. Does it need explaining?

HEVERN (*rising, in an injured tone*). Of course it needs explaining when the other party does not understand. I'll regard it as an insult if you reject—

SOPHIA. So? Very well then— (*She rises and paces the room.*) You propose to me that together we start saving Russia—

HEVERN. You're caricaturing my statement.

SOPHIA. Well, you propose something of the sort. I do not consider

myself capable of such a difficult task. This is in the first place. In the second place, I can't consider you, either, as worthy of that role—

HEVERN. What role?

SOPHIA. Say the role of a cultural worker—

HEVERN (*smiling*). Really? Why?

SOPHIA. Because you are a petty plunderer.

HEVERN (*more surprised than injured*). Pardon me! This—this I didn't expect. Nor do I understand it.

SOPHIA. I speak after long deliberation. Here on my desk I have documents which convict you of a series of dishonest actions—

HEVERN (*sitting down, sharply*). There can be no such documents.

SOPHIA (*standing at the desk, calmly and weightily*). I have a copy of your agreement with the Buyanovo peasants. I'm acquainted with your deal with the marshal of nobility—

HEVERN (*shrugging*). That was business.

SOPHIA (*in a lower voice, with an effort*). You're urging Tarakanov to prepare a false inventory—

HEVERN. Tarakanov is mentally unbalanced.

SOPHIA (*lowering her voice still more*). And Shokhin, whom you tried to bribe—is he too mentally unbalanced?

HEVERN. It's all been misrepresented.

SOPHIA. You've been dipping more and more and with increasing brazenness into my brother's pocket—is this activity, according to you, also necessary in Russia?

HEVERN (*wiping his face with a handkerchief*). Will you let me explain it to you?

SOPHIA (*walking about the room*). Well, my dear sir, what explanations can there be? Everything is clear.

HEVERN (*carefully putting out his cigar*). Then in your opinion I'm a dishonest man, unworthy of being your husband?

SOPHIA (*stops surprised, and laughs*). You are an extraordinarily naïve man, you know!

HEVERN (*smiling and spreading his hands*). Well, if I went too far, I did so because I was convinced of your kindly interest in me.

SOPHIA. I don't follow.

HEVERN. I believed that you regarded me as your friend, and regarded my business interests as yours.

SOPHIA. Oh, I see. Well, you were mistaken.

HEVERN. Mistakes should be excused. I felt that seeing the way your brother is running the business, rather than condemn me you would approve my foresight—

SOPHIA (*goes up to him and speaks in a quiet but firm voice*). Get out!

HEVERN, bristling, makes a move toward her; she picks up something from the desk. For a few seconds they stand staring at each other in silence.

HEVERN (*stepping back*). You are—a very ill-mannered woman. You are ridiculous as well!

He goes off, quickly, putting on his hat before he is out. SOPHIA *seats herself on the corner of the desk and covers her eyes with one hand, while rubbing her knee hard with the other.* STYOPKA *appears at the door.*

STYOPKA (*looking at* SOPHIA *and sighing*). Do you want me to make a fire?

SOPHIA (*in a low voice*). No. Oh, all right, make it.

STYOPKA. Shokhin asks if you'll see him.

SOPHIA. Oh, let him wait.

STYOPKA. He has to go to the forest.

SOPHIA. Don't bother me! All right, call him in— Quick!

STYOPKA *hurries off, brushing past* ANTIPA *in the doorway.*

ANTIPA. What the devil's all the rush? Sonya, what's happened? The German banged into me in the drawing room, hissing and looking green—and left without saying good-by.

SOPHIA (*in a coarsely cynical tone*). He's taken you for ten thousand this year, my boy.

ANTIPA. Really? A smart fellow! Doesn't pass up any chances. Oh, people! And Pavla says one should be kind—people, she says, are longing to have a warm faith reposed in them. Where's Pavla—do you know?

SOPHIA. You should go away somewhere—

ANTIPA. Indeed! Why should I?

SOPHIA (*putting away the papers on the desk*). You've grown too lazy, Antipa. It's no pleasure even to look at you. And please leave me now. Why are you running around loose all day long?

ANTIPA (*bluntly, going off*). I'm looking for a place for myself—

SOPHIA *paces the room, straightening up her hair.* STYOPKA *enters with a load of kindling.* SHOKHIN *appears at the door.* SOPHIA *glances at him.*

SHOKHIN. Shokhin has come.

SOPHIA. Yes. What is it, Yakov? Quick.

SHOKHIN. Please discharge me. Let me go.

SOPHIA. All right. Wait—what's the idea?

SHOKHIN. There are reasons.

SOPHIA. Well—I'm very sorry.

SHOKHIN. I'm sorry too.

SOPHIA. Has anybody wronged you?

SHOKHIN. No.

STYOPKA. He's telling lies. That saintly one, the holy nun, does him wrong—

SHOKHIN. Tell her to get out—

STYOPKA. I'll go by myself. (*Runs off.*)

SHOKHIN. The reason is I can't stay on with the young mistress—I'm afraid of her.

SOPHIA. What?

SHOKHIN. She makes me feel uncomfortable—with that pitying look of hers. I can't bear it. Of course, I'm a guilty man. But to be tried every day, that's not justice, that's torture. Since she came into the family it's as if she's put sand in our machine. One doesn't feel right with her. Even you are worn out—

SOPHIA (*stares at him without listening and speaks quietly*). And such soft, gentle eyes—

SHOKHIN. Her eyes? Don't believe them. Believe her acts. And there'll be nothing good in what she will do.

SOPHIA. I wasn't speaking about her.

SHOKHIN. Those that are quiet—they crawl up close and sting without missing. The snake is quiet.

SOPHIA. That'll do, Yakov.

SHOKHIN. Don't believe the German either. He's a stranger and has no shame. As to that man I shot, I mean his wife and children—

SOPHIA. I'll see to that, don't you worry. But where will you go?

SHOKHIN. To the city. After that—I don't know.

SOPHIA. I'm sorry for you.

SHOKHIN. And I'm sorry for you. You're all alone here. The boss is drunk without wine. May God grant you success in everything. Good-by, Sophia Ivanovna.

SOPHIA. Good-by. (*She extends her hand to him. He takes and holds it in his, staring at her with furrowed brow.*) Perhaps you'll change your mind?

SHOKHIN. No. I'd better stay away till she's dead.

SOPHIA. She? Why should she die?

SHOKHIN. Why should she live? She has nothing to live for. Good-by. (*Backs out of the room.*)

SOPHIA (*looks after him, rubs her eyes and mutters*). It's a nightmare.

She sees PAVLA *and* MIKHAIL *reflected in the mirror as they pass outside the door, with* PAVLA *snuggling playfully to his shoulder. In a frightened, quiet voice she calls out:* "Pavla!" *The two enter side by side,* MIKHAIL *smiling embarrassedly.*

MIKHAIL. Oh, a fire! That's nice.

PAVLA. Why do you look so glum? (*Puts her arms around* SOPHIA.) Hear what Misha's written—

SOPHIA (*peering into her face*). Look, my child. Only recently, this very day, I spoke to you—

MIKHAIL. Oh, a serious talk!

SOPHIA. I'd like you to go out.

MIKHAIL (*sitting down on the floor by the fire*). No, I won't go.

SOPHIA (*in a tired voice*). You seem determined to drive me mad—really!

Enter ANNA MARKOVNA.

ANNA MARKOVNA (*to* SOPHIA). And I've been looking for you everywhere. You shouldn't hide yourself, because Antipa Ivanovich is not quite in his senses today—bawls everybody out—

SOPHIA. Anna Markovna, I want to talk to them privately.

ANNA MARKOVNA (*in an injured tone*). All right, I'll go. Although I'm the mother— (*She goes off.*)

MIKHAIL. But really, there's nothing to talk about, Aunt Sonya—there's nothing new. You'd better hear my poem.

PAVLA (*gazing narrowly at* SOPHIA *and swaying on her feet*). I don't want to talk about anything either—

SOPHIA (*looks them over and goes to the desk*). Very well. Let's sit quietly, then, and calm down.

PAVLA. Go on, Misha, read it.

MIKHAIL. I'm ready, Mother.

PAVLA. Again? I thought I asked you not to call me that.

MIKHAIL. It's your legal rank.

SOPHIA (*impatiently*). Read, Mikhail.

MIKHAIL (*smiling*). All right. Let me think how it goes.

PAVLA. I remember it. ANNA MARKOVNA *appears at the door.*

ANNA MARKOVNA (*in a loud whisper*). Father's coming—stop it.

SOPHIA. Anna Markovna, you shouldn't—

ANNA MARKOVNA. I'm at fault again—

PAVLA *clings to* SOPHIA. MIKHAIL, *on the floor, frowns and moves into the shadow. Enter* ANTIPA. *He regards everybody with sullen eyes, his arms hanging at his sides, his fingers moving.*

ANTIPA. Why must you all stop? Suppose you *are* gathered in a room, reading verse, talking—why not? There's nothing wrong in that— (*Suddenly, with anguish.*) Stop being afraid of me, damn it. I'm a human being like everybody else!

SOPHIA. Not so loud, Antipa.

ANTIPA. Shut up. Why do you always stop me? Why does everybody run away from me? Am I a wild beast or what? It's when a man is left alone—naturally he becomes wild—

MIKHAIL. Father!

ANTIPA. Yes?

MIKHAIL. Give Shokhin a raise.

ANTIPA (*slowly*). What's this? Making fun of me?

MIKHAIL. No, no, honest to God! Just that it'll brighten him up.

ANTIPA. What's that, Sophia?

SOPHIA. Nothing, just Misha's fooling. Shokhin is leaving us.

ANTIPA. Is he? Where's he going?

SOPHIA. I don't know.

PAVLA. I'm glad he's going. I'm afraid of him—

ANTIPA. You're afraid of everything. That's where you make a mistake— (*Pauses.*) So Yakov is leaving? Strange. What's prompted him?

MIKHAIL. I didn't know he was leaving.

ANTIPA. What do you know? The Father sells lumber, and the son cooks up verse. It's pretty funny—

MIKHAIL. Here it comes—

Everybody falls silent. PAVLA *whispers something to* SOPHIA.

ANTIPA. I thought it was bad manners to whisper.

SOPHIA (*wearily*). Why don't you do something? Even drink, if there's nothing else. Anna Markovna, make us some tea, will you?

ANNA MARKOVNA. It's too early for tea.

SOPHIA. I want you to check Hevern's account, Misha.

MIKHAIL. Right away?

SOPHIA. Yes.

MIKHAIL. You've thought this up to get rid of us all. You've taken the best room in the house and object when anybody else sits here.

SOPHIA. What utter nonsense!

MIKHAIL. It isn't nonsense.

ANTIPA (*to* PAVLA). Why are you so quiet?

ANNA MARKOVNA. Now if you please. She whispered—it was wrong. She keeps quiet—it's wrong again.

ANTIPA. Woman, shut up!

ANNA MARKOVNA. Oh, my God! Pasha dear!

ANTIPA. What do you mean always stirring up trouble here?

SOPHIA. Get hold of yourself, Antipa!

ANTIPA. Keep quiet, sister. I see through everything. You're blind—

PAVLA (*quietly and very firmly*). Antipa Ivanovich, I'll ask you not to shout at my mother!

ANTIPA. My shouting won't break her to pieces.

PAVLA (*moving closer to him*). You are a bad and spiteful man. I don't love you—I'm afraid of you.

ANTIPA. In God's name, Pavla, what's come over you?

SOPHIA. Wait, listen, Pavla—

PAVLA. No, you listen to me. I love Misha.

MIKHAIL. Oh, for God's sake! (*Shrinks deeper into the shadow.*) Don't believe her, Father. She's just making it up because she's bored.

ANTIPA *sinks into a chair and stares at his wife in silence. He looks fearful.*

PAVLA (*wincing*). Well— Oh, God— Kill me—I don't care! I know Misha doesn't love me—I know that. What of it? I love him—he's better than anybody. Well—kill me!

ANNA MARKOVNA. Pasha dear, don't speak like that—

SOPHIA. Anna Markovna, please go.

ANTIPA. Oh, Pavla! Go! Go quick! Sister, lead her away—quick!

SOPHIA *puts her arm around* PAVLA *and leads her out.* ANNA MARKOVNA *follows them silently, like a shadow.* MIKHAIL, *sitting*

on the floor, presses close to the wall behind the fireplace. ANTIPA *sits petrified, staring at the floor like a bull, muttering:*

That's how it is— That's how it is, brother— You're an old man—yes, you are—

Fidgets in his chair, pulls open his shirt collar, picks up a ruler from the desk, breaks it, throws the pieces into the fire. Picks up a book, glances at it, tosses it on the floor. Finds a small revolver, smiles, and, screwing up one eye, gazes into its barrel. A calm and serious expression settles on his face as he sits motionless, with his eyes closed, his right hand with the revolver resting on his knee, and his left hand grasping his beard. MIKHAIL *rises, frightened, quietly moves over to him and grabs the revolver, but* ANTIPA *holds it fast in his hand as he jumps to his feet and speaks.*

You?

MIKHAIL. Listen to me, Father—

ANTIPA. Get out of here—quick.

MIKHAIL (*moving toward the door*). I'm not to blame. I want nothing. She said it herself. You heard her—

ANTIPA. It makes no difference—it's all the same—

MIKHAIL. I know these thoughts—

ANTIPA. What thoughts?

MIKHAIL (*pointing at the revolver*). These—

ANTIPA (*throws the revolver on the floor, toward the door*). Fool! You think I'll do that because of you? You drunkard! Get out!

MIKHAIL. Don't think badly of me. I know I'm a useless sick man. I feel ashamed in front of you—in front of everybody. I tell you honestly, I seek nothing from Pavla.

ANTIPA (*in a rage*). Get out, if you don't want me—to kill you! I'll forget you're my son— (*Suddenly rushes over and, grabbing* MIKHAIL *by the collar, shakes him.*) So that's what you're thinking in that filthy head?

MIKHAIL. It's you who are thinking that—

ANTIPA. I?

MIKHAIL. I'm older than you—inside. I've done nothing wrong.

ANTIPA. You've taken the heart out of me. SOPHIA *runs in.*

SOPHIA. Let go! Let him go! Run, Misha!

MIKHAIL *runs off, picking up the revolver on his way out.*

ANTIPA (*his head bowed, puts his arm around* SOPHIA's *shoulder*). Sophia, dear—quick! Get them all out of the house— Hide her somewhere. Send Mikhail away. I'm afraid of what I may do, Sophia—a great sin is walking around me. Do something! My heart—is giving way— (SOPHIA *seats him in a chair and closes the door.*) That's killed me—

A shot is heard. ANTIPA *jumps to his feet, stares at the floor, and stands speechless.*

SOPHIA (*glances at the desk and dashes to the door*). He's taken the revolver from the desk!

ANTIPA (*staggering*). It's Misha—my son—

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The same room. ANTIPA *is sitting, as though drunk, in an armchair by the fireplace. Behind him* MURATOV *walks about quietly, smoking, thinking.*

ANTIPA. What's the doctor saying?

MURATOV. How would I know? I just got here with him.

ANTIPA. Oh, yes.

MURATOV (*throwing him a disturbed glance*). He probably hasn't had time to look him over yet.

ANTIPA. Sophia pushed me out of the room. (*After a pause.*) Why did you come?

MURATOV. I've told you—the doctor was at my place when Shokhin drove up—

ANTIPA. Shokhin— He too killed a man.

MURATOV. So I tagged along with the doctor, thinking I might be of some use.

ANTIPA. You?

MURATOV. Why, yes.

ANTIPA. Where's Shokhin?

MURATOV. He's been sent to town for dressings.

ANTIPA. So. You have an explanation for everything.

MURATOV. There's nothing to explain here.

ANTIPA (*with a snicker*). Nothing, h'm. You haven't much love for me, have you, aristocrat?

MURATOV (*stopping for a second*). This is hardly the time to talk about love.

ANTIPA (*repeating slowly*). Hardly the time to talk about love. What words! Now I'm not afraid to say that I don't love anybody— Except Sophia—I respect her very much. (*After a pause.*) To say "I love"—that's very dangerous. Is the doctor drunk?

MURATOV. Not very. As usual.

ANTIPA. Won't he do some harm to Mikhail?

MURATOV. No—you know he's a good doctor.

ANTIPA. Yes. He's a good man, too. Only you've made him a drunkard. You've corrupted everybody here—including Mikhail— You are a harmful person. Wait!

Rises from the chair in alarm. Enter SOPHIA.

SOPHIA (*walking in hurriedly, her sleeves rolled up*). Well, the wound is not dangerous. Do you hear, Antipa?

ANTIPA. Not dangerous? Is that true?

SOPHIA. Of course it's true.

ANTIPA (*sinking into a chair*). Thank you.

SOPHIA (*walks off to her room, speaking to* MURATOV *on the way*). Don't let him go anywhere.

MURATOV (*nods to her, and turns to* ANTIPA). You see?

ANTIPA. What did she whisper to you?

SOPHIA *returns, carrying some towels.*

SOPHIA. I told him that you shouldn't go out for a while.

ANTIPA. You should have told me, not him.

SOPHIA (*going off*). That's unimportant—

MURATOV. Well, Misha will recover.

ANTIPA. And I'm mortally sick.

MURATOV. Oh, that'll all pass.

ANTIPA. Yes—when we're dead. And don't you try to cheer me up—I don't want it. Nothing will console me.

Pauses. MURATOV *stops and looks at him out of the corner of his eye.*

You're a man of education, you know the laws of things. Explain this to me. I'm in good health—I'm greedy for work— Perhaps my troubles come because I'm so healthy. But my son is weak and indifferent to everything—why is this? What law is operating here?

MURATOV (*reluctantly and uncertainly*). Well—one generation works, the other gets tired, or rather is born tired—

ANTIPA. I don't understand—

MURATOV. The children apparently show the fatigue of their parents passed on in their blood—

ANTIPA. Generation—you talk in words that seem to hint at something—

MURATOV. I've made no hints.

ANTIPA. Well, look—some work, others loaf themselves to death. It doesn't seem right.

MURATOV. Did you drink much when you were young?

ANTIPA. I? No. My father did. My wife too had a weakness for it—she came of a drunken family. She was bored with our life, since I hardly ever stayed home. She always smelled of mint or dry tea leaves —she ate them to drown the smell of wine. As for Mikhail, he was spoiled by Sophia—he lived with her, as you know—she taught him to read books, to make up verse. The pendulum, he says, is like a poleax—it chops off the heads of the minutes—a funny idea, minutes with heads—something like ants, I suppose. And yet, who knows, there may be nothing funny about that.

He closes his eyes as if dozing off. SOPHIA *appears at the door and*

makes signs to MURATOV. MURATOV *glances at* ANTIPA *and goes over to her.*

SOPHIA. Misha wants to see him. I took Pavla out of the room. But she may return. Go and keep her away. She mustn't meet Antipa for the present—you understand.

MURATOV. Of course. But you do waste yourself on trivialities—it's really shocking.

SOPHIA. Well, run along.

MURATOV. I obey. But think—does it suit one like you—

SOPHIA (*dryly*). Are you going?

MURATOV *bows and goes off.* SOPHIA *watches him in the mirror.*

ANTIPA (*lifting his head slightly*). What do you want him for?

SOPHIA. I don't want him.

ANTIPA. That's the girl. It's better to beg or steal than live with the likes of him—

SOPHIA (*coming up to him*). Listen—

ANTIPA. Sonya, how can that be? Father worked, I worked, we've accumulated enough for a thousand people, but we can do nothing with it. What has all the struggle been for? Mikhail is a dead soul. You are childless—

SOPHIA. Is this the time to talk about these things?

ANTIPA. How do you like that? And the forester said: "Is this the time to talk about love?"

SOPHIA. You *would* find a man like that to discuss love with—you funny fellow.

She puts her hand on his shoulder. He takes it in his own hand and looks at her fingers.

ANTIPA. Your hand is small, but strong. Ah, you should have been a wife to me, not a sister—

SOPHIA (*withdrawing her hand*). Look—Misha wants to see you.

ANTIPA (*recoils and half rises*). Did he want it himself or did you put it into his head?

SOPHIA. He wanted it himself.

ANTIPA. You swear?

SOPHIA. You'll have to take my word for it.

ANTIPA (*getting to his feet*). It'll be hard for me to see him.

SOPHIA. Let's go.

ANTIPA. It always made me feel uncomfortable to look at him. And what wrong did I do him? He was tired of life, and I wasn't. Is she there?

SOPHIA. No. She's not to blame for anything.

ANTIPA. I know. Her kind are always innocent. It's such as me that are always to blame. Sonya, what is she—who is she, this Pavla?

SOPHIA. It's too late to ask. She's just a young girl living in the dream of her youth—

ANTIPA. There's the happiness and rest I've found.

SOPHIA. You have to pay a stiff price for happiness.

ANTIPA. I only wanted a little.

SOPHIA. It always looks small while you hold it in your hands, but let it go, and you learn at once how big and precious it is. (*Hurriedly.*) That has nothing to do with your case.

ANTIPA. Never mind. I hoped there would be children.

SOPHIA. You've thought this up now.

ANTIPA. No, I did hope for it, looked forward to it. A childless wife —what joy is there in that?

SOPHIA *wants to answer, but turns away with a wave of her hand.* What's the matter?

SOPHIA. I'm waiting for you. Are you coming?

ANTIPA. I am. Tell me, Sonya, why have women always felt bored and sick to death in my company? They look as if they love you, but they never open their hearts. Why is that?

SOPHIA. Stop whining.

ANTIPA. I'm not whining. I used to be a handsome man—

SOPHIA. In the eyes of women you've always been only half a man—

ANTIPA. That's a lie.

SOPHIA. If you think it over, you'll find I'm right.

ANTIPA (*glancing at the clock on the wall*). And what shall I talk about to Mikhail?

SOPHIA. You'll have to find a subject.

ANTIPA. The pendulum is like a poleax— You see, I'm not sorry for him— I'm only ashamed for myself—sorry for myself—because I tortured myself for nothing. SOPHIA *is absorbed in thought.* Well, let's go.

SOPHIA (*resolutely*). No. Don't go. It'll be better not to.

ANTIPA. But what will he think?

SOPHIA. I'll tell him you're not well—or have dozed off.

ANTIPA. But perhaps I'd better go?

SOPHIA (*sternly*). I said no.

ANTIPA. Then I'll drop in on him in an hour or so—when I feel calmer. My thoughts are all drunk, running wild now. A terrible turmoil is going on in my heart, Sonya.

SOPHIA. You talk too much! (*Hurries off.*)

ANTIPA (*walks about the room, then comes to the desk, looks through the papers and mumbles, pointing to the door*). You don't understand everything either, my friend. No. (*Reads one of the papers, throws it back, frowns, picks it up again and reads, muttering to himself.*) Yes— Oh, say! (*Chuckles.*) Ah, Sonya! So that's it!

SHOKHIN, *carrying packages, enters cautiously. Noticing* ANTIPA, *he draws back.*

Who's there?

SHOKHIN. Shokhin has come—with dressings.

For a few seconds they gaze at each other in silence.

ANTIPA. There, Yakov, I too have killed a man.

SHOKHIN. One can't help it here—

ANTIPA. And a son at that—

SHOKHIN. It's too crowded. You can't see who's who.

ANTIPA. I hear you're leaving.

SHOKHIN. Yes, but I'm not complaining.

ANTIPA. Let's go together.

SHOKHIN. Where to?

ANTIPA. Where were you going?

SHOKHIN. I don't know yet.

ANTIPA. Well, I'll go along with you.

SHOKHIN. If you really mean it, I'll wait for you. You'll hand over the business to Sophia Ivanovna, I take it?

ANTIPA. Why not? She'll manage it.

SHOKHIN. Of course.

ANTIPA. And we'll go to all the holy places.

SHOKHIN. I'm not very good at praying—

ANTIPA. Your father took care of that for you—

SHOKHIN. It seems so. Where do I put these?

ANTIPA. What is it? Dressings? Take them in there.

SHOKHIN. I'm a little afraid—

ANTIPA. And there was a time you were afraid of nothing.

SHOKHIN. Everything up to a point.

ANTIPA. It's hard to live with people, Yakov.

SHOKHIN. The trouble is, you don't see them as people—they're all either judges or defendants.

ANTIPA. So, it's settled—we're going?

SHOKHIN. Well, if you're serious, nothing binds me.

STYOPKA *rushes in.*

STYOPKA. What are you doing here, mister? Hand over the dressings, quick. (*She notices the master, screams, and disappears.*)

ANTIPA. See? That's how frightful I am.

SHOKHIN. She's stupid, but a good girl—

ANTIPA. Is it right to frighten the good ones?

SHOKHIN (*going off*). No sense in that.

Left alone, ANTIPA *gazes for a few seconds at a portrait over* SOPHIA'S *desk, turns down the light of the desk lamp, then turns it up again.* PAVLA *runs in.*

PAVLA. Sophia Ivanovna— (*Noticing* ANTIPA, *draws back and stands with her head bowed.*)

ANTIPA (*comes up to her slowly, touches her head with the palm of his hand and, thrusting it back, looks in her eyes*). Well?

PAVLA (*quietly*). Go ahead—beat me.

ANTIPA. You meek little viper—

PAVLA. Don't torture me—beat me—

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ANTIPA. What shall I beat you for? (*Raises his fist.*)

PAVLA. Make it quick, O Lord!

ANTIPA. What shall I beat you for?

PAVLA. I don't know—for being young—for having made a mistake, thinking you were different—for not loving you— (*Covers her face.*)

ANTIPA (*grips her hands, draws them apart, and, continuing to hold them, speaks hoarsely*). Go—off with you! What have you done to me?

PAVLA (*sinking onto the floor*). I've done nothing—

ANTIPA *releases her hands, and as she falls he slowly raises his foot as if about to kick her. Checking himself, he squats on the floor and, placing her head on his lap, strokes it, whispering.*

ANTIPA. Don't be frightened, my child—I'm not going to touch you—wake up! My sweet child—

SOPHIA'S *and* MURATOV'S *voices are heard off stage.*

SOPHIA. Stop talking nonsense.

MURATOV. But what is going to happen to you?

Enter SOPHIA *and* MURATOV.

SOPHIA (*rushing over to her brother*). What have you done?

MURATOV (*stepping back with fright*). Devil take it—

ANTIPA. Quiet.

SOPHIA (*feeling* PAVLA). Has she fainted?

ANTIPA. I don't know.

MURATOV. I'll go call the doctor.

SOPHIA. Quick, he's in Tarakanov's cottage.

PAVLA (*comes to and looks around. Speaks first to* ANTIPA). Go away, please. Sonya, take me away.

ANTIPA. All right. (*Withdraws into the shadow by the veranda door and stands with his back to the others.*)

SOPHIA. What's happened?

PAVLA. He was going to beat me—

SOPHIA (*to* ANTIPA). Please leave the room.

ANTIPA. I don't want to.

PAVLA (*stands up, holding on to* SOPHIA). Antipa Ivanovich—you know, I wanted to love you.

ANTIPA. Don't talk about it.

PAVLA. I wanted you to be kinder.

ANTIPA. H'm—

PAVLA. But you never have pity or love for anybody. Why don't you love your son? Why are you jealous of him, why do you drive him away from you? He's a poor sick boy—is that his fault?

ANTIPA. Is it my fault I'm in better health? Is it my fault I don't feel sorry for those who are good-for-nothing? I love business. I love work. On whose bones has this world been built? Whose sweat and blood have watered the earth? That hasn't been done by the likes of him and you. Can he take upon himself the work I do?

SOPHIA. That's enough—

ANTIPA. Hundreds of people live without want, hundreds have come up in the world, thanks to my work and my father's before me. What has he done? I did something wrong, but at least I'm always working toward some end. To listen to you kindhearted people, every kind of work is a sin against something. That's not true. My father used to say, if you don't kill poverty you don't wash away sin, and that's the truth.

PAVLA. Nobody speaks well of you.

ANTIPA. What of it? Out of their envy they accuse me of being rich. I say everybody should be rich, everybody should have power, so no man would have to bow his head before others or wait on them. Let people live in independence, without envy, and they'll be good in themselves. Let them fail to reach this state, and they will be lost in their baseness. Those are Sophia's words, and true words they are.

SOPHIA *regards her brother intently.*

PAVLA. And how about Misha?

ANTIPA. There I can do nothing—it's not in my power. I have nothing to blame myself for as regards him. (*Lowering his voice.*) Perhaps I am to blame toward you— I mean, I saw you, you took my fancy—I felt I wanted to taste joy with you, to have some rest—or have I not earned a rest?

PAVLA. Lord! Can't we live quietly and peacefully, loving one another—loving everybody?

SOPHIA *moves away from her, preoccupied.* We have to change our way of life.

ANTIPA (*glumly*). Well, begin—show the way—

PAVLA. My dear ones, we cannot—we mustn't go on living like this, without love or pity for anyone. My dear people, can we really hate everybody? Oh, God! Oh, God! After all, there is something we all believe in, there is justice somewhere.

ANTIPA. It hasn't been made ready for you yet.

PAVLA. But surely we must think of justice, look for it—

SOPHIA (*in a low voice*). You can't think up justice, you have to work it out. Work, that's what we have to do, Pasha, not just look for something. You find only what you've had and lost.

ANTIPA (*gloomily*). The peace of one's soul is lost.

SOPHIA. Peace is not justice.

PAVLA (*wearily*). I don't understand you—I don't understand anything.

Enter ANNA MARKOVNA, *leading* MIKHAIL. *A smile on his face, he walks with a fairly steady step, grasping* ANNA'S *shoulder with one hand and stretching the other out in a conciliatory gesture.*

SOPHIA (*anxiously rushes up and helps support him*). Why did you get up? You shouldn't have let him.

ANNA MARKOVNA. He said, Lead me—I want to see Father.

MIKHAIL. It's all right, Aunt Sonya.

ANNA MARKOVNA. He said, Father won't come to me.

PAVLA. But don't you understand—

ANNA MARKOVNA. You understand a whole lot! That's right, scold your mother some more!

MIKHAIL. Just a moment— Don't shout. It's all my fault.

SOPHIA *helps him to a chair.*

ANTIPA (*goes over to his son, not looking straight at him, and speaking in a low voice*). You shouldn't have done it. I'd have come over myself—a little later. I was about to do it, but—we've been talking here—

MIKHAIL. Listen, Father—

SOPHIA. It's bad for you to talk.

MIKHAIL. It's worse to keep silent.

ANTIPA. Did you hurt yourself very much?

MIKHAIL. You must forgive me, Father—

ANTIPA. Oh, well—forget it! We don't know who's to blame for that—

MIKHAIL. I know.

PAVLA. Who is it then?

ANNA MARKOVNA. Who can it be if not the poor, defenseless folks?

SOPHIA. You mustn't say such things, Anna Markovna.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Don't you pick on me, my good woman.

ANTIPA. For Christ's sake keep quiet, you crow, or I'll—

SOPHIA. Stop it, Antipa.

ANTIPA (*panting*). Pff! What a pest!

MIKHAIL. Hold on, Father, don't excite yourself. There's nothing really terrible in all this—it's more funny than anything—

ANTIPA. You would say something like that! Oh, Mikhail—it's all wrong, I tell you—it's all wrong.

MIKHAIL. Don't let it upset you.

MURATOV *appears at the door and beckons to* SOPHIA. *She goes over. They talk agitatedly.*

SOPHIA. The doctor? Did he really?

MURATOV. He did. Says it's all stuff and nonsense. He said the people here have gone bats from having nothing to do—and then he left.

SOPHIA. But we must have a doctor here. Please send Shokhin to bring him back at once— MURATOV *makes a wry face and goes off.*

ANTIPA (*to* MIKHAIL). Well, what are you laughing at?

MIKHAIL. I feel I want to tell you something nice, Father, something right from the heart—

ANTIPA (*embarrassed*). Now, now—what's all this about? You keep quiet—rest.

MIKHAIL. You see, Father, I understand you— Sometimes, quietly, from a distance, I've even admired you. And to admire—that means to like.

ANTIPA (*surprised and incredulous*). Did you hear, Sophia? Listen to what he says—

PAVLA (*to* SOPHIA). But it's bad for him to talk.

SOPHIA *checks her with a movement of her head.*

MIKHAIL. You are an ax in the hand of God—in some great, creative hand— Both you and Aunt Sonya. She's even sharper than you are. Whereas I and all those like me—we're nothing but rust. What I want to say, Father—and I've been thinking it over a lot—is this —there are no useless people—only harmful people. So you mustn't torment yourself.

ANTIPA (*is moved. Bending over, he kisses his son on the brow, then draws himself up*). Well, God bless you, son. Thank you. It makes me feel well. May God help you for what you said. A father, Mikhail—a father is not just a lump of flesh either—he's a living being, with a soul—he too loves. How can a man not love? He can't help it—all the joys are in love—

PAVLA (*weeping quietly*). Oh, dear, I don't understand—

ANTIPA (*to* PAVLA *triumphantly*). You see? (*To* MIKHAIL.) Then, too, being your father, how well I know you. Why, before you were able to talk I was already anxious about you, son—I thought—a man will grow here who is the closest thing I have—he'll take upon himself my labors and my sins—he'll justify my whole life—

MIKHAIL (*deeply stirred*). I've nothing to take them with—Aunt Sonya, I want—

He faints. SOPHIA *rushes to him.* PAVLA, *frightened, jumps out of the way.* ANTIPA *goes down on his knees.* ANNA MARKOVNA *keeps to her daughter's side.* MURATOV *appears at the door.*

PAVLA (*in a loud whisper*). He's died.

SOPHIA. Stop it.

ANNA MARKOVNA. They got him at last.

ANTIPA. What's the matter with him, Sophia? Where's the doctor?

SOPHIA. The doctor's left. Bring some water—

PAVLA (*excitedly*). There. Couldn't they have gone to his room? Oh, the heartless people!

MURATOV (*in a low voice*). You shouldn't make so much noise.

PAVLA (*angrily*). Leave me alone. What do you want? I don't like you.

MURATOV (*bowing*). That leaves me practically undisturbed.

MIKHAIL (*coming to*). Help me to—

SOPHIA (*to* ANTIPA *and* MURATOV). Lift him.

MIKHAIL. It's all right. I can manage—

ANTIPA *and* MURATOV *lead him out. He laughs.* So much attention— I'm honored! *The three of them go off.*

PAVLA (*stopping* SOPHIA). What am I to do? Tell me—

SOPHIA. Wait. I have to see about Misha.

PAVLA. I feel I'm going to die too. Tell me, what am I to do? Where am I to go?

SOPHIA. Figure it out for yourself. You're no wife to Antipa, no sister to Mikhail—

ANNA MARKOVNA. I told you we shouldn't sell our home.

PAVLA. Keep quiet, Mother.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Where will you hide yourself now?

SOPHIA. You talk a lot about love, Pavla, but you don't know how to love. When one loves somebody, everything is clear—where to go, what to do—it all takes care of itself and one doesn't have to ask anybody about anything.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Now you know, live as it pleases you. Yes, fine advice you're giving her—

SOPHIA. On a sunny day you don't ask why it's bright. The sun hasn't risen yet in your soul, Pavla.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Don't listen to these speeches, Pavla, don't listen to them.

SOPHIA. You do a great deal of harm to your daughter, Anna Markovna.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Of course, who could be more harmful than a mother? Oh, no, my good woman, permit me to say—

SOPHIA (*turning toward the door*). I know it's useless to discuss this with you—forgive me, it just slipped out— (*Goes off.*)

ANNA MARKOVNA. Run, run quick to your lover.

PAVLA. It's not true. She hasn't a lover.

ANNA MARKOVNA (*calmly*). No matter. She will have one.

PAVLA (*walking about the room*). The sun hasn't yet risen in my soul—

ANNA MARKOVNA. Just you believe everything she says! Don't think of the sun but of yourself—how to have a quiet and pleasant life. Everybody wants a pleasant life. You must leave that bandit, and that lady, too, is no companion for you—she's of the same thieving blood. And we are quiet people. You have your own money—twenty-five thousand—and there'll be more if you look for it. With his own money a person can live as he likes—a ruble that's your own is dearer than a brother— Then take me—what sort of life do I lead in this house? It's time for me to get a rest—I'm forty-one and what am I here?

PAVLA. Oh, what you're saying has nothing to do with it. Oh, why did I leave the convent?

ANNA MARKOVNA. With your own capital you can live like a lady, even in a convent. You could take me with you. There's no friend more faithful than a mother—she understands everything—she'll cover up everything.

PAVLA. Wait—somebody's coming.

ANNA MARKOVNA. Let's get away from here, shall we? The police may be here soon.

PAVLA. The police?

ANNA MARKOVNA. Certainly. I've sent for them. *Enter* MURATOV.

PAVLA. How is he?

MURATOV. He's tired and has dozed off.

PAVLA. He won't die?

MURATOV. He will eventually—that's certain.

PAVLA. But when? Not now?

MURATOV. I don't know exactly when.

ANNA MARKOVNA. You shouldn't make fun of our simplicity, sir.

PAVLA. Forget it, Mother. The wound isn't dangerous, is it?

MURATOV. It was a small caliber revolver without much fire-power—the bullet grazed a rib and came out through his side—nothing dangerous in that.

PAVLA. Thank God! Thank God! Vassily Pavlovich, I believe I was rude to you today—

MURATOV. Don't worry about that. I know your Christian sentiments.

PAVLA. I don't even remember what I said.

MURATOV. I assure you it was nothing.

ANNA MARKOVNA. You're all mussed up, Pasha—

PAVLA (*glancing in the mirror*). Heavens! Why didn't you tell me before?

ANNA MARKOVNA. I was too busy.

PAVLA. Please excuse me, I have to leave you.

MURATOV. By all means.

PAVLA. So Misha will be up soon?

MURATOV. I don't know. The doctor says his organism is worn out by too much drinking and dissolute living.

PAVLA. Oh, such words—

ANNA MARKOVNA. You run along. These things are no concern of yours.

The two go off. MURATOV *sits down in the chair at the desk, bends over, and clasps his head in his hands. He looks deeply depressed. Enter* SOPHIA. *At the sight of* MURATOV *her tired face becomes stern.* MURATOV *lifts his head and sits up straight.*

SOPHIA. I suppose you're tired?

MURATOV. And you?

SOPHIA. I am a little.

MURATOV. You should rest. I'll be off in a moment. But before I go, may I ask you a question?

SOPHIA (*after a pause*). Go ahead.

MURATOV. I want to apply for a transfer to the Vladykin forestry station. You know the forester there has committed suicide—

SOPHIA. Yes, I know.

MURATOV. But should I decide to stay on here, could I count—

SOPHIA (*banging the desk with something, resolutely*). No.

MURATOV. But let me finish—I wanted to ask if I could count on a change in your attitude toward me.

SOPHIA. I understood your question without hearing it all.

MURATOV (*rises, smiling*). Shokhin killed a man, but really you treat him more kindly than you do me.

SOPHIA (*after a pause*). Possibly— Probably— What is Shokhin? He's an honest brute. He thought it was his duty to kill people who stole from his master. But he has realized what he did. He will not forgive himself for it as long as he lives. He regards people differently now. (*She sits down.*)

MURATOV. You are wrong as always.

SOPHIA. In the past seven years, the Shokhins at your forestry station have killed and maimed several dozen men.

MURATOV. Not as many as that—

SOPHIA. And how many more have been thrown into jail, how many families have been ruined for an armful of brushwood! Have you counted those?

MURATOV. Of course not. Nor do I see what business you have with these statistics. Madam, this is all romanticism. How would you recommend dealing with thieves?

SOPHIA. I don't know, but not that way. They don't steal from us, for example.

MURATOV. They don't? This, madam, is not a fact but only an appearance, as our doctor, another romantic like you, is fond of saying.

SOPHIA. We'll have to bring this argument to a close. It flares up every time we meet.

MURATOV. You argue with me quite unnecessarily.

SOPHIA (*rising*). Now listen to me, Vassily Pavlovich. In my eyes you're worse than Shokhin—than any drunken peasant. A peasant can be made into a man. You are hopeless. It's not easy for me to say all this to you—

MURATOV. Romanticism doesn't suit a business woman like you.

SOPHIA. No, it isn't easy, either, to see you as you are. An intelligent and educated man who has no love for people—no desire to work—that repels me— I saw the fire go out, I saw you go to pieces, debauch others—

MURATOV. Five minutes ago, from another room, I overheard Anna Markovna utter a wise thought—everybody, she said, wants a pleasant life. That is profoundly true. Those people, including your nephew, whom I've supposedly debauched—what are they worth? What difference does it make whether it is I who'll crush them, whether it'll be done by somebody else, or whether they will slowly crush one another?

SOPHIA. It is easy to be a Mephistopheles in a country town. You should try to be an honest man.

MURATOV. Quite well said. But what is an honest man?

SOPHIA. We have nothing to talk about.

MURATOV. In other words, you can't answer me. What a solitary person you are—alone and powerless!

SOPHIA. That's not true. There are people somewhere who feel about life as I do. After all, one can take into his soul only what exists in life—and nothing else. I have something in my soul that's good and radiant. It must therefore exist outside my soul too. I have faith in the possibility of a different life. Therefore, in other people too there is this gracious faith. There are many things I don't understand. My education is deficient. But I feel life is a blessing and people are good— And you always lie about people—and even about yourself.

MURATOV. I always speak the truth.

SOPHIA. The truth of those who are lazy, self-centered, or injured in their feelings—it's something evil and decaying—a dying truth.

MURATOV. Until today it has been regarded as immortal.

SOPHIA. No, there is another kind that lives and grows— There is another Russia, not the one in whose name you speak. You and I are strangers to each other. I'm no traveling companion for you, and now, I hope, we've closed the subject.

MURATOV (*taking his hat from the mantelpiece*). Unfortunately. But I'm convinced that on the way to that other truth you'll break your neck. I say chuck these fantastic dreams and accept my hand, the hand of an interesting man—will you?

SOPHIA *gazes at him in silence.* MURATOV *moves toward the door.* Think it over. We could go abroad, to Paris—it's far more entertaining than your town Myamlin. You're young, beautiful. They know how to appreciate beautiful women in Europe—what innumerable pleasures are in store for you! And I'm not jealous—your little flirtations will even please me— We could make life burn bright. What do you say?

SOPHIA (*winces and speaks quietly, with disgust*). Please go.

MURATOV. It makes me sad—

ANTIPA *runs into him in the doorway.*

ANTIPA. Let me by, will you?

MURATOV. Well, good-by. (*Goes off.*)

ANTIPA. Good-by. (*To* SOPHIA.) Has Mikhail gone to sleep? That was a good talk I had with him. (*Looks closely at her and glances at the door.*) Has that slimy devil upset you with something again? Why are you so nice to him?

SOPHIA. A long time ago—some six years back—I liked that man—

ANTIPA. You were young. Do you want me to go?

SOPHIA. Wait— It doesn't matter, do as you like.

ANTIPA (*after a pause*). Perhaps Mikhail will drink less now—what do you think, Sonya?

SOPHIA. What?

ANTIPA. Well, never mind. Think your own thoughts— I'll go.

SOPHIA. What did you ask?

ANTIPA. I said perhaps Misha will cut down on his drinking.

SOPHIA. I doubt it. Hardly. Don't bother him. Leave him to me.

ANTIPA. I'm ready to leave everything to you. But what about— her?

SOPHIA. Let her go.

ANTIPA (*quietly*). Where to?

SOPHIA. Anywhere she wants.

ANTIPA *sits down, lapsing into silence.* SOPHIA *walks over to him.* What else can you think of?

ANTIPA (*sullenly*). It's not the custom among our kind to divorce our wives.

SOPHIA. What sort of a wife is she to you? Your life will be torture with her.

ANTIPA. No, that's no good. I'd better go myself. I'll leave everything to you and go where my feet take me. I've nothing to live for now. Ah, it's a great pity you have no children.

SOPHIA (*moves away from him coldly*). Who made me marry a dying man?

ANTIPA. Well, I did. I know. But then it's made you rich, the first woman in the district, stronger than any of these twopenny-halfpenny gentlefolk. As for children, they come not only from husbands—

SOPHIA. Your kind consideration comes too late!

ANTIPA. Ah, Sonya, Sonya—

SOPHIA. What are you "ah-ing" about? You won't go anywhere. That's all nonsense.

ANTIPA (*reflectively*). I feel ashamed. It's all wrong—all wrong! I'm not afraid of sin, but I don't like misery. And it's grabbing hold of me, this misery. With misery you can neither live nor work.

SOPHIA. Forget it. One can't escape from oneself. I feel no better than you do, and my misery is more bitter than yours, but I don't hide myself away. If you only knew how painful it is to lose respect for a man—how it breaks one's heart— If you only knew how eagerly I've looked for good men, what faith I've had in finding them. Well, I haven't found one yet. But I'll go on looking—I will.

ANTIPA. We're unlucky people, you and I, Sophia. We have only enemies around us.

SOPHIA. If they were only clever. A clever enemy is always a good teacher.

ANTIPA. What can he teach?

SOPHIA. How to resist. My husband, for example. He was an enemy to me, but I respect him—he taught me a lot! (*Comes up to* ANTIPA *and lays her hand on his head.*) Well, enough of that. We are alone

now, just you and me, and we'll live alone. Who knows, good people may come along yet who will teach us and help us. After all, good people do exist, don't they?

ANTIPA (*reflectively*). If you don't show your own goodness, you won't find anything good. Those are your own words—

SOPHIA. Show it then. Pull yourself together. Remember—did you ever give in to anybody? Must you give in to misfortune? Of course you mustn't.

ANTIPA (*rises, throws back his shoulders, and looks at his sister, smiling*). You make everything so simple, Sophia. Where do you get it, God bless you. Let me embrace you, my only one—thank you! (*They embrace.* ANTIPA *brushes away his tears.*) Well, let's live, let's argue. Now I'll make things hum—it'll shake the earth.

SOPHIA. That's more like it! Now go. I have to be alone—go, dear! We're friends—and I'm glad.

ANTIPA. Don't speak or I'll cry SHOKHIN *appears in the doorway.*

SHOKHIN. The Chief of Police has come.

ANTIPA (*angrily*). What? Why?

SOPHIA. Who asked him to come?

SHOKHIN. Anna Markovna sent Vassily for him.

ANTIPA. I'll show her—

SOPHIA. Stop. I'll see to it myself. Keep out of it, stay here.

ANTIPA. No, I'll throw her out the window, together with her daughter. SHOKHIN *grins broadly.*

SOPHIA. Shokhin, don't let him go. (*To* ANTIPA.) Do you hear me? Sit quietly.

ANTIPA (*rushing about the room*). They called the police— I'll show them! Why are you grinning?

SHOKHIN. No reason.

ANTIPA. Better not be! Do you think I'm really going with you? No, let others step out of it—I'll stay where I belong. Frightening me with the police, eh? (*Stopping before* SHOKHIN.) And you too. You can't go anywhere—forget it. You've committed a sin against the people and have to redeem it before them.

SHOKHIN. But I'm going to stay now—

ANTIPA. That's fine. It's a shameful thing to keep knocking around. Look how our mistress Sophia Ivanovna bears up, and she's a woman. PAVLA *runs in.*

PAVLA. Antipa Ivanovich, there's a visitor there—

ANTIPA (*checking her with a movement of his hand*). I know. It's the police. You have nothing to fear—it was your mother who sent for him. Go your own way. Leave us.

PAVLA (*alarmed*). Where shall I go?

ANTIPA (*turning away from her*). It's up to you. Good-by.

PAVLA. But where can I go?

ANTIPA. Your mother will show you. Good-by.

PAVLA *goes off slowly as* SHOKHIN *makes way for her, bowing his head.* ANTIPA *walks to the veranda door and stops there, his head pressed against the glass pane.* SHOKHIN *gives a heavy sigh. Without changing his position, in a low voice* ANTIPA *repeats:*

Good-by.

CURTAIN

YEGOR BULYCHOV AND THE OTHERS

YEGOR BULYCHOV'S rebellion against God is pictured in this play against the background of the Russian people's rebellion against the Tsarist government. The events of the latter rebellion are easily dated. In the opening scene it is the end of 1916. War with Germany continues. Large numbers of wounded soldiers keep arriving in Moscow hospitals. High government officials still have to be bribed when supplies are sold to the army. Early in 1917 Grigory Rasputin, the Tsar's and the Tsarina's favorite, is killed. Public protests about the war and the conduct of the war grow louder. In March, 1917, the Tsar abdicates. For a short time the power passes into the hands of the representatives of trade and landed property. Bulychov's associates and friends look forward to new conquests. The Dostigayevs and Zvontsovs attend meetings and join in street demonstrations. But there are also revolutionists like Yakov Laptev, and it is clear that they have no intention of accepting the Dostigayevs and the Zvontsov as their new masters. The song Yegor Bulychov hears drifting in from the street as he fights off death and rebels against his doom is the revolutionary song of the demonstrating crowds, a funeral dirge for those fallen in the struggle for freedom and a renunciation of the old world.

A. B.

YEGOR BULYCHOV AND THE OTHERS

CHARACTERS

KSENIYA YAKOVLEVNA, YEGOR BULYCHOV'S wife
SHURA, BULYCHOV'S illegitimate daughter living in his house
GLASHA, a maid in the BULYCHOVS' house
VARVARA (VARYA) YEGOROVNA, ANDREY ZVONTSOV'S wife and BULYCHOV'S daughter
ANDREY PETROVICH ZVONTSOV, a lawyer
YEGOR VASSILYEVICH BULYCHOV
FATHER PAVLIN SAVELYEV
DONAT, a forester
MOKEY PETROVICH BASHKIN, BULYCHOV'S manager
NIFONT GRIGORYEVICH, a doctor
STEPAN TYATIN
VASSILY YEFIMOVICH DOSTIGAYEV, BULYCHOV'S partner in business
ELIZAVETA (LIZA), DOSTIGAYEV'S wife
YAKOV (YASHKA) LAPTEV, BULYCHOV'S godson.
ALEXEY, TONYA } DOSTIGAYEV'S children by his first wife
MELANYA, an abbess; KSENIYA'S sister
A TUBA PLAYER
TAISYA, a nun in MELANYA'S service
MOKROUSOV, a policeman
ZOBUNOVA, a village healer
PROPOTEY, a village innocent, exorcist, and prophet

ACT I

The dining room in BULYCHOV'S *house. Heavy, cumbersome furniture. A wide, leather-upholstered couch by the wall, adjacent to a staircase leading to the second floor. In the corner, right, a recess with French windows and a door to the garden.*
It is a bright winter day.
KSENIYA, *sitting at the table, is washing the tea dishes.* GLASHA, *in the recess, is busy arranging flowers. Enter* SHURA, *in a dressing gown, with slippers on her bare feet. Her uncombed hair is red, like that of her father,* YEGOR BULYCHOV.

KSENIYA. Oh, Shura dear, you do stay in bed late—

SHURA. Don't jump on me, it won't help. Coffee, Glasha. Where's the newspaper?

GLASHA. I took it upstairs, to Varvara Yegorovna.

SHURA. Go get it. Subscribing to one paper for the whole house! The cheapskates! GLASHA *goes off.*

KSENIYA. Who are the cheapskates?

SHURA. Is Father in?

KSENIYA. He's gone to visit the wounded soldiers. Who are the cheapskates? The Zvontsovs?

SHURA. That's right. (*Speaking on the telephone.*) 17–63.

KSENIYA. I'll tell the Zvontsovs how well you speak of them!

SHURA. Call Tonya.

KSENIYA. What are you coming to?

SHURA. Is that you, Tonya? Want to go out skiing? No? Why not? Going to a show? Chuck it. Oh, you illegitimate widow! All right.

KSENIYA. How can you call an unmarried girl a widow?

SHURA. Hasn't her fiancé died?

KSENIYA. Still, she's just a girl.

SHURA. How do you know?

KSENIYA. You shameless baggage! GLASHA *returns.*

GLASHA (*handing* SHURA *a cup of coffee*). Varvara Yegorovna will bring the paper herself.

KSENIYA. You know much too much for your age. Look out. The less one knows, the better one sleeps. When I was your age I didn't know anything.

SHURA. The same as now.

KSENIYA. Oh, you're hopeless! VARVARA *comes down the stairs.*

SHURA. Ah, here comes my dear sister under full sail. Bonjour, Madame. Comment ça va?

VARVARA. It's eleven o'clock, and you're still not dressed, your hair isn't up—

SHURA. Here we go—

VARVARA. You're getting more and more brazen, the way you take advantage of Father's ill health and the fact that you happen to be his pet—

SHURA. Are you set for a long spiel?

KSENIYA. What does she care about Father's health?

VARVARA. I'll have to tell him about your conduct—

SHURA. Thanks in advance. Have you finished?

VARVARA. You're a fool.

SHURA. I don't believe it. You must be thinking of somebody else.

VARVARA. A redheaded fool!

SHURA. Varvara Yegorovna, you're wasting your breath.

KSENIYA. Why even try to teach her anything?

SHURA. Furthermore, your character is deteriorating.

VARVARA. All right, all right, my dear! Mother, we'd better step into the kitchen. The cook seems to be in some kind of a mood.

KSENIYA. He's out of sorts. His son has been killed.

VARVARA. That's no excuse for being moody. Lots of people are getting killed today. VARVARA *and* KSENIYA *go out.*

SHURA. She'd be screaming bloody murder, if her handsome Andrey got knocked off.

GLASHA. You're wasting your time teasing them. Drink your coffee quick—I have to clear the table.

She picks up the samovar and goes off. SHURA *throws herself back in her chair, closing her eyes and clasping her hands behind her head.* ZVONTSOV, *in slippers, comes down the staircase, sneaks up to her from behind, and puts his arms around her.*

ZVONTSOV. What are you dreaming about, my red nanny goat?

SHURA (*without stirring, her eyes still closed*). Don't touch me.

ZVONTSOV. Why not? I thought you liked it. You do, don't you?

SHURA. I don't.

ZVONTSOV. Why not?

SHURA. Let go. You're only pretending you like me.

ZVONTSOV. You want me to like you, is that it?

VARVARA *comes down the steps.*

SHURA. If Varvara hears about it—

ZVONTSOV. Quiet— (*Moves away and assumes a lecturing tone.*) Y-yes— You should pull yourself together—see to your education—

VARVARA. She prefers to be impertinent and to blow soap bubbles with Tonya.

SHURA. So I do blow soap bubbles. I like it. Are you sorry for the soap?

VARVARA. I'm sorry for you. I don't know how you're going to live. You've been asked to leave school—

SHURA. That's not true.

VARVARA. You have a crazy girl for your best friend—

ZVONTSOV. She wants to study music.

VARVARA. Who does?

ZVONTSOV. Shura.

SHURA. That's not true. I don't want to study music.

VARVARA. What made you think she did?

ZVONTSOV. Didn't you say yourself you wanted to, Shura?

SHURA (*going off*). I never said anything of the sort.

ZVONTSOV. H'm! That's strange. Surely I haven't thought it up. You're too hard on her, Varya.

VARVARA. And you're too gentle.

ZVONTSOV. What do you mean, too gentle? You know my plan—

VARVARA. A plan is a plan, but I think you're suspiciously pleasant with her.

ZVONTSOV. You have stupid ideas in your head.

VARVARA. Have I?

ZVONTSOV. Think—is this the time, when things are so serious everywhere, to indulge in jealous scenes?

VARVARA. What brought you down here?

ZVONTSOV. Me? There's an advertisement in the paper. And also the forester's come, says the peasants have surrounded a bear—

VARVARA. Donat's in the kitchen. And what's the advertisement about?

ZVONTSOV. This is really outrageous! Talking to me this way! Am I a schoolboy? Damn it—

VARVARA. Don't excite yourself! I think Father has returned—and you in your slippers.

ZVONTSOV *hurries off, up the staircase.* VARVARA *turns to meet her father.* SHURA, *wearing a warm green blouse and a green cap, runs in, heading for the telephone. She is caught on the way by* BULYCHOV, *who presses her to his breast.* FATHER PAVLIN, *in a purple cassock, follows* BULYCHOV *into the room.*

BULYCHOV (*sits down at the table, with his arm around* SHURA'S *waist, as* SHURA *strokes his graying coppery head*). They've maimed so many people, it's frightening to look at them.

PAVLIN. Blossoming out, aren't you, Shura? Forgive my not shaking hands with you—

SHURA. I'd have shaken your hand, Father Pavlin, but Daddy grabbed me like a bear—

BULYCHOV. Keep still, Shurka. What can those men do with themselves now? And we had plenty of useless people even before the war. We had no call to get into this scrap—

PAVLIN (*with a sigh*). The high authorities had their reasons—

BULYCHOV. They didn't reason it out so well with the Japs either—only disgraced the country before the whole world—

PAVLIN. Still, wars not only bring ruin—they also enrich nations with experience as well as—

BULYCHOV. Yes, some take up a rifle, others rifle the treasury.

PAVLIN. Moreover, nothing happens in this world unless it's the will of God—and what can our complaints mean?

BULYCHOV. Leave off preaching, Pavlin Savelyev. Are you going out skiing, Shura?

SHURA. Yes, I'm waiting for Tonya.

BULYCHOV. Very well. If you're still around in five minutes or so, I'll call you. SHURA *runs off.*

PAVLIN. The virgin has filled out—

BULYCHOV. She's got a good body, very supple, but she hasn't had much luck with her face. Her mother was a homely woman. Clever as the devil, but homely.

PAVLIN. Your daughter has—an uncommon face, which is not devoid of charm. Where did her maternal parent come from?

BULYCHOV. She came from Siberia. You say the high authorities, the will of God, and all that sort of thing. What about the Duma? Where does that come from?

PAVLIN. The Duma, one might say, is the high authorities' toleration of their own belittlement. Many people believe that this is a fatal error. But it doesn't become a minister of religion to go into consideration of such matters. Moreover, in these days the priesthood bears the duty of inspiring confidence and deepening the love of throne and country—

BULYCHOV. You inspire and bless—and what a hell of a mess!

PAVLIN. You know I've persuaded the warden of my church to enlarge the choir. I've also spoken to General Bettling requesting a donation for a bell to be installed in the church now under construction and dedicated to our heavenly intercessor and your namesake, Saint—

BULYCHOV. He didn't contribute for the bell?

PAVLIN. Refused—and even joked in an unpleasant way. I dislike brass, even in regimental bands, he said. It'd be a good thing if you made a donation for the bell on account of your ill health.

BULYCHOV (*rising*). You don't cure a disease by bell ringing.

PAVLIN. Who can say? Science is ignorant of the causes of diseases. I've heard in some foreign sanatoriums they treat patients with music. We too have a fireman who plays a horn to cure sick people—

BULYCHOV. What kind of horn?

PAVLIN. A brass horn. They say it's very big.

BULYCHOV. Well, it must be good if it's big. Does it cure?

PAVLIN. They say it does. Everything is possible, my esteemed Yegor Vassilyevich, everything. We live in a world of mysteries, in the darkness of innumerable and insoluble mysteries. We think we see everything clear in the light of our reason, but it's clear only for our bodily vision, whereas our spirit is merely darkened by reason and perhaps is being gradually extinguished.

BULYCHOV (*with a sigh*). You do have a lot of words, my friend.

PAVLIN (*with growing animation*). Take the God-inspired man Propotey, for example. In what great joy does he live, this man whom the ignorant call a fool!

BULYCHOV. There you go again—preaching— Good-by. I'm tired.

PAVLIN. My heartiest wishes for your good health. I'll be praying for you— (*Goes off.*)

BULYCHOV (*feeling his right side, walks to the couch muttering to himself*). Fat hog! Has stuffed his belly with Christ's body and blood. Glasha! *Enter* VARVARA.

VARVARA. What is it?

BULYCHOV. Nothing. I called Glasha. My, aren't you all dolled up! Where are you going?

VARVARA. To a benefit performance for convalescents.

BULYCHOV. A lorgnette, too? Don't tell me you can't see well—it's a lie—you just want to be in fashion—

VARVARA. Father, I wish you'd speak to Shura. She behaves atrociously and is becoming utterly impossible.

BULYCHOV. You're all very fine. Run along. (*Muttering to himself.*) Impossible? Well, one thing is very possible—when I get stronger I'll kick you all out!

GLASHA. Did you call me?

BULYCHOV. I did. Oh, Glasha—you do look lovely. You're so healthy, so firm. Not like Varvara—she's like a weasel.

GLASHA (*casting a glance at the staircase*). That's her good luck. If she had looks, you'd be dragging her to bed with you.

BULYCHOV. My own daughter? Come to your senses, you fool. Think what you're saying.

GLASHA. I know what I'm saying. You paw Shura the way you would any strange girl—the way a trooper would.

BULYCHOV (*astounded*). Have you gone raving mad? Are you jealous of my daughter? Don't you dare think of Shura that way. A trooper! Any strange girl! What do you know about troopers? Have you been in their arms? Well?

GLASHA. This is neither the time nor place to talk about such things. What did you call me for?

BULYCHOV. Tell Donat to come here. Wait, give me your hand. You still love me—sick man that I am?

GLASHA (*pressing herself to him*). Oh, what a heartache you've been to me! Only don't be sick—get better.

She breaks away and runs off. BULYCHOV *smiles abstractedly, wetting his lips and shaking his head, then walks over to the couch and lies down.* DONAT *comes in.*

DONAT. Wishing you good health, Yegor Vassilyevich.

BULYCHOV. Thank you. What news have you brought?

DONAT. Good news. We've trapped a bear.

BULYCHOV (*with a sigh*). Well, that doesn't fill me with joy, only envy. I can't amuse myself with bears now. Are you cutting timber?

DONAT. Slowly. We're short of men.

Enter KSENIYA, *all dressed up, with many rings on her fingers.*

BULYCHOV. What is it?

KSENIYA. Nothing. I don't think, Yegor, you should bother about the bear. You're not fit to go out hunting.

BULYCHOV. Be still. Short of men, you say?

DONAT. Old men and boys are the only ones left. The prince has been able to get half a hundred war prisoners, but they can't work in the woods.

BULYCHOV. They work on women, I suppose.

DONAT. That's a fact.

BULYCHOV. Yes. Women are hungry now.

KSENIYA. They say there's much debauchery going on in the villages.

DONAT. Why debauchery, Kseniya Yakovlevna? The men have been killed, children have to be produced, don't they? So it follows—those who did the killing must do the producing.

BULYCHOV. Looks like it.

KSENIYA. No good children can come from war prisoners. Though, of course, if the man is strong—

BULYCHOV. And the woman is a fool, he'll have no desire to have children by her.

KSENIYA. Our women are no fools. But all the healthy men have been sent to the front—only lawyers are left at home.

BULYCHOV. Yes, a lot of people have been destroyed.

KSENIYA. But then the rest will have more money.

BULYCHOV. You've got it all figured out.

DONAT. Tsars and kings are always hungry for more people.

BULYCHOV. How was that?

DONAT. I say, tsars and kings are always hungry for more people. Our Tsar hasn't enough to feed his own people, but he must conquer more of them.

BULYCHOV. You're right there.

DONAT. It's impossible to understand otherwise what sense there is in our fighting. Well, we see the result—we're being beaten for our greed.

BULYCHOV. You talk sense, Donat. My godson Yakov also says—greed is the beginning of all sorrow. How's he doing up there?

DONAT. He's all right. He's a clever fellow.

KSENIYA. A clever fellow! He's impertinent, not clever.

DONAT. He's impertinent because he's clever, Kseniya Yakovlevna. He's picked up deserters up there, Yegor Vassilyevich, about a dozen, and put them to work. They work all right—and it keeps them from thieving, which is what they were doing before.

BULYCHOV. Well, I don't know. That policeman, Mokrousov, will make trouble when he hears about it.

DONAT. He knows it—and he's even glad. It makes it easier for him.

BULYCHOV. Well, look out. ZVONTSOV *comes down the stairs.*

DONAT. So your orders about the bear—

BULYCHOV. The bear is your stroke of luck.

ZVONTSOV. Allow me to offer the bear to General Bettling. You know, he's very useful to us.

BULYCHOV. I know. Offer it to him. Or, for that matter, offer it to the Archbishop.

KSENIYA (*chuckling*). It would be a sight to see the Archbishop shooting a bear.

BULYCHOV. Well, I feel tired. Good-by, Donat. Things aren't going well though, are they? Since I got sick, it's all begun to go wrong. DONAT *bows silently and exits.* Send Shura over, Kseniya. KSENIYA *goes out.* What is it, Andrey? Don't hem and haw, speak out.

ZVONTSOV. It's about Yakov.

BULYCHOV. Well?

ZVONTSOV. I have information that he has close ties with—subversive elements, and made anti-government speeches to the peasants at the Koposov fair.

BULYCHOV. Forget it! Today there are no fairs worth talking about, nor peasants. And why are you all complaining about Yakov?

ZVONTSOV. But he's practically one of the family. SHURA *runs in.*

BULYCHOV. Practically. An awful lot of family feeling you show for him! He's even stopped coming to dinner on Sundays. Leave me now, Andrey. You can tell me the rest of it later. ZVONTSOV *goes off.*

SHURA. Was he tattling on Yakov?

BULYCHOV. That's none of your business. Sit down here. They're all complaining about you too.

SHURA. Who's all?

BULYCHOV. Kseniya, Varvara—

SHURA. They're not all.

BULYCHOV. I'm speaking seriously, Shura dear.

SHURA. When you speak seriously you speak differently.

BULYCHOV. You're too flip with everybody, run around doing nothing—

SHURA. If I'm not doing anything, how can I be flip?

BULYCHOV. You don't listen to anybody.

SHURA. I listen to everybody. They make me sick, carrot-top.

BULYCHOV. You're a carrot-top yourself—worse than I am. And another thing, you don't talk—the right way to me either. I should really give you a good scolding, but I don't feel like it.

SHURA. If you don't feel like it, you shouldn't.

BULYCHOV. I shouldn't, eh? If one doesn't feel like it, one shouldn't do it. It would be easy to live that way, but one can't.

SHURA. Who's stopping you?

BULYCHOV. Everybody. That's something you can't understand.

SHURA. Then teach me to understand—to know how to keep them from getting in my way.

BULYCHOV. You can't teach that. *Enter* KSENIYA. What is it, Kseniya? Why do you keep wandering about? What are you looking for?

KSENIYA. The Doctor's come, and Bashkin is waiting, too. Pull down your skirt, Shura, look how you sit.

BULYCHOV (*rising*). All right, call in the doctor. KSENIYA *goes off.* It's bad for me to lie down, it makes me feel heavy— Ah! Well, run along, Shura. And be careful you don't sprain your ankle.

SHURA *leaves the room. Enter the* DOCTOR.

DOCTOR. Good morning. How are you feeling?

BULYCHOV. Not so well. Your treatment is none too good, Nifont Grigoryevich.

DOCTOR. Well, let's go into your room.

BULYCHOV (*walking beside the* DOCTOR). I want you to give me the strongest and most expensive drugs. I positively must get better. If you cure me, I'll build a hospital and make you the head doctor there, to do as you please. *They go off. Enter* KSENIYA *and* BASHKIN.

KSENIYA. What did the doctor tell you?

BASHKIN. He says it's cancer—cancer of the liver—

KSENIYA. Goodness gracious! The things they pick up!

BASHKIN. He says it's a dangerous disease.

KSENIYA. So he would. Everybody thinks his is the hardest job.

BASHKIN. This is the wrong time to get sick. Money's falling all around, as if somebody had a hole in his pocket. People who never had a kopeck make fortunes, and he—

KSENIYA. Yes, people are getting terribly rich.

BASHKIN. Dostigayev, for example—he's put on so much weight he can't button his clothes, and he talks only in thousands. While your Yegor Vassilyevich seems to be sinking slowly into a mental eclipse. The other day he said: My life, he said, has passed by the true work. What can he mean by that?

KSENIYA. Oh, I've noticed too—he speaks very strangely.

BASHKIN. And it was you and your sister's capital that put him on his feet. He ought to be multiplying it.

KSENIYA. I made a mistake, Mokey, I've known that for a long time. I married one of my father's store clerks, but the wrong one. If I'd married you, we'd have had such a peaceful life. But he— Oh, God, what a mischievous man he's been! What I've suffered at his hands! He got himself a daughter by another woman and wished her onto me. He picked a husband for my daughter—the worst he could find. I'm

afraid, Mokey Petrovich, my son-in-law and Varvara will trick and cheat me, and leave me without a stitch to my name.

BASHKIN. Everything's possible. It's war. In war there's neither shame nor pity.

KSENIYA. You've served our family a long time, Mokey. My father gave you a start in life. Try to think what I ought to do.

BASHKIN. I am thinking. *Enter* ZVONTSOV.

ZVONTSOV. Has the Doctor left?

KSENIYA. He's still in there.

ZVONTSOV. How's the cloth, Mokey Petrovich?

BASHKIN. Bettling refuses to accept it.

ZVONTSOV. How much do we have to give him?

BASHKIN. About five thousand, no less.

KSENIYA. What a robber! And he's an old man.

ZVONTSOV. Through Jeanne?

BASHKIN. Such is the arrangement.

KSENIYA. Five thousand! For what?

ZVONTSOV. Money's cheap today.

KSENIYA. In another man's pocket.

ZVONTSOV. Is my father-in-law agreeable?

BASHKIN. That's what I've come to find out.

The DOCTOR *enters.*

DOCTOR (*taking* ZVONTSOV *by the arm*). Now, my friend—

KSENIYA. I hope it's good news.

DOCTOR. The patient must be on his back as much as possible. Excitement, annoyances, business affairs of any kind are extremely bad for him. Nothing but rest. Then— (*He whispers to* ZVONTSOV.)

KSENIYA. Why can't I be told too? I'm his wife.

DOCTOR. There are things about which it's rather difficult to talk to ladies. (*Whispers again.*) We'll have it this very evening.

KSENIYA. What will you have?

DOCTOR. A consultation, a council of doctors.

KSENIYA. Oh, my God!

DOCTOR. That's nothing to be afraid of. Well, good-by. (*Goes.*)

KSENIYA. Such a strict gentleman. And what nerve. Five rubles for five minutes—sixty rubles an hour—I tell you!

ZVONTSOV. He says it's necessary to operate.

KSENIYA. To cut? Oh, no! I'll permit no cutting—

ZVONTSOV. See here—surgery is a science—that's pure ignorance.

KSENIYA. I don't give a damn for your science. There—I can be as rude as you are!

ZVONTSOV. I'm not talking about civilities, but about your darkness.

KSENIYA. You're not too bright yourself.

With a wave of his hand, ZVONTSOV *moves off.* GLASHA *runs in.* Where are you rushing to?

GLASHA. The bedroom bell rang. KSENIYA *and* GLASHA *go off.*

ZVONTSOV. My father-in-law has chosen the wrong time to get sick.

BASHKIN. Yes—it does make things more difficult. This is the time when clever people, like conjurors, pull money straight out of the air.

ZVONTSOV. True. Besides, revolution is coming.

BASHKIN. That I don't approve. We had it in 1905. Little sense to it.

ZVONTSOV. In 1905 we had a mutiny, not a revolution. The peasants and workers were at home then—now they're at the front. Now the revolution will be against officials, governors, cabinet ministers.

BASHKIN. In that case, God grant it. Officials are a terrible lot. Once they get their hooks into you, you can't shake them off.

ZVONTSOV. It's plain the Tsar is incapable of ruling.

BASHKIN. There's talk about that among the business people too. It's said some peasant has got around the Tsarina.

VARVARA *appears on the staircase and stops to listen.*

ZVONTSOV. That's right, Grigory Rasputin.

BASHKIN. I don't believe in witchcraft somehow—

ZVONTSOV. Do you believe in lovers?

BASHKIN. It seems incredible. She has hundreds of generals.

VARVARA. You're talking silly nonsense.

BASHKIN. Everybody's talking that, Varvara Yegorovna. Still I don't believe we can do without tsars.

ZVONTSOV. It's not in St. Petersburg we need a tsar. It's in one's own head. Is the show over?

VARVARA. It's been put off. Some high inspector has arrived—a train-load of wounded soldiers is expected this evening, but there's no place to put them. *Enter* GLASHA.

GLASHA. You're wanted, Mokey Petrovich.

BASHKIN *goes off, leaving his winter peaked cap on the table.*

VARVARA. Why are you so frank with him? You know as well as I do that he's spying on us for Mother. This cap of his—he's worn it for ten years, the miser. It's oily all over. I can't understand your having anything to do with such a crook—

ZVONTSOV. Oh, stop it, I want to borrow some money from him to bribe Bettling.

VARVARA. But I've told you Liza Dostigayeva will fix that through Jeanne. And it'll cost less, too.

ZVONTSOV. She'll cheat you, that Liza—

KSENIYA (*from* BULYCHOV'S *room*). Come persuade him to lie down. He keeps walking around scolding Mokey— Oh, Lord!

ZVONTSOV. Go on in, Varya.

Enter BULYCHOV, *in a dressing gown and felt slippers.*

BULYCHOV. What else? An unfortunate war?

BASHKIN *follows* BULYCHOV *in.*

BASHKIN. I'm not arguing.

BULYCHOV. For whom is it unfortunate?

BASHKIN. For us.

BULYCHOV. Who are us? You say yourself millions are being made on the war. Well?

BASHKIN. I mean, for the people.

BULYCHOV. The people are the peasants. It's all the same to them whether they live or die. That's the truth.

KSENIYA. Please don't lose your temper. It's bad for you.

BASHKIN. Now really—what sort of truth is that?

BULYCHOV. The very real truth, the only one. I say frankly—my business is to make money, and the peasants' business is to produce bread and buy merchandise. What other truth is there?

BASHKIN. Of course, that's so. But—

BULYCHOV. Well, what's but—? What do you think of when you steal from me?

BASHKIN. There's no call to be insulting.

KSENIYA. Why don't you do something, Varya? Make him lie down. It's the Doctor's orders.

BULYCHOV. Do you think of the people?

BASHKIN. And insult me in front of others, too. I steal. That has to be proved.

BULYCHOV. No proofs are needed. Everybody knows—stealing is lawful. Nor have I anything to gain by insulting you. It won't make an honest man of you, rather the opposite. And it isn't you who steal —the ruble steals— The ruble by itself is the worst thief—

BASHKIN. Only your godson, Yakov, can say such things.

BULYCHOV. He does say them. Well, you may go. And don't pay any graft to Bettling. We've paid him plenty, enough for the old devil to buy himself a coffin and shroud. BASHKIN *goes off.* Why are you all here? What are you waiting for?

VARVARA. Nothing.

BULYCHOV. Nothing, really? If that's the case, go attend to your business. You have something to do, haven't you? Kseniya, tell them to air my room. It's stuffy there, smells of stale medicine. And tell Glasha to bring me some cranberry kvass.

KSENIYA. You're not allowed to drink kvass.

BULYCHOV. Go tell her. I know what I'm allowed and not allowed to drink.

KSENIYA. I wish you did know—

KSENIYA *goes off followed by* VARVARA *and* ZVONTSOV. BULYCHOV, *alone, walks around the table, holding on to it with his hand, then looks at himself in the mirror.*

BULYCHOV (*lowering his voice but slightly*). Things are in a bad way with you, Yegor. And even your face doesn't look like your own. *Enter* GLASHA, *carrying a glass of milk on a tray.*

GLASHA. Here's your milk.

BULYCHOV. Give it to the cat. I want kvass—cranberry kvass.

GLASHA. I've been ordered not to give you kvass.

BULYCHOV. They've ordered you not to, but you bring it. Wait. What's your opinion—am I going to die?

GLASHA. It can't be.

BULYCHOV. Why not?

GLASHA. I don't believe it.

BULYCHOV. You don't? No, ma'am, things are in a bad way with me. A very bad way, I know.

GLASHA. I don't believe it.

BULYCHOV. You are obstinate. All right, bring me the kvass.

GLASHA *goes off.*

Meanwhile I'll have some orange brandy. It does one good. (*Walks to the sideboard.*) They've locked it up, those devils. Pigs! Guarding it. Looks as if I'm a prisoner.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The living room in the BULYCHOV *house. In a corner, sitting at a small round table with wine bottles on it, are* ZVONTSOV *and* TYATIN.

ZVONTSOV (*lighting a cigarette*). Do you understand?

TYATIN. To be quite honest with you, Andrey, I don't like it.

ZVONTSOV. But you like money?

TYATIN. Money I do like, I'm sorry to say.

ZVONTSOV. Who are you worrying about?

TYATIN. Myself, of course.

ZVONTSOV. I wouldn't be concerned about that.

TYATIN. Still, you know, I'm the only friend I have.

ZVONTSOV. You should think, not philosophize.

TYATIN. I think. Shura's a spoiled young woman—it won't be easy to live with her.

ZVONTSOV. You'll get a divorce.

TYATIN. And she'll keep the money.

ZVONTSOV. We'll see to it that it stays with you. And I take it upon myself to break her in for you—

TYATIN. Honestly—

ZVONTSOV. That'll make them marry her off as quick as possible, and increase the dowry to boot.

TYATIN. That's a clever idea! And what's the dowry?

ZVONTSOV. Fifty.

TYATIN. Thousand?

ZVONTSOV. No, buttons.

TYATIN. Fifty, really?

ZVONTSOV. But you'll sign me a promissory note for ten.

TYATIN. Thousand?

ZVONTSOV. No, ten rubles! You're a funny fellow, Stepan.

TYATIN. Too much.

ZVONTSOV. Then let's forget about it.

TYATIN. Are you really serious?

ZVONTSOV. Only fools aren't serious about money.

TYATIN (*with a chuckle*). It's a darn clever idea, I must say.

Enter DOSTIGAYEV.

ZVONTSOV. I'm glad you're showing signs of comprehension. In these fierce times you, as an intellectual of proletarian standing, cannot permit yourself—

TYATIN. Yes—of course. But I think it's time for me to be getting over to the courtroom.

DOSTIGAYEV. What's bothering you, Stepan?

ZVONTSOV. We've been talking about Rasputin.

DOSTIGAYEV. What an end, isn't it? And this common Siberian peasant played checkers with bishops and cabinet ministers—handled huge sums of money—hundreds of thousands—never took less than ten thousand for a bribe—never. I have inside information. What are you drinking? Burgundy? That's a heavy wine, to be drunk with dinner, you uncivilized people!

ZVONTSOV. How did you find my father-in-law?

DOSTIGAYEV. Why should I be trying to find him—he wasn't hiding. Bring me a glass, Stepan. (TYATIN *goes out unhurriedly.*) Bulychov, I must say frankly, is in a bad way. He's in a dangerous state—

ZVONTSOV. It seems to me, too, that he's—

DOSTIGAYEV. That's right. Just that. And he's afraid of death. For that very reason he's sure to die. And you should reckon with this fact right now—for your own good. In these days a man can't stand gaping with his hands in his pockets— He has to go after what he wants. On all sides swine are uprooting the props on which the state rests, and even the governors now realize that revolution is around the corner.

TYATIN *returns.*

TYATIN. Yegor Vassilyevich has come out into the dining room.

DOSTIGAYEV (*taking a glass from* TYATIN). Thank you, Stepan. He's come out, you say? Well, we'll go in there too.

ZVONTSOV. The industrialists seem to understand their role—

Enter VARVARA *and* ELIZAVETA.

DOSTIGAYEV. The ones in Moscow? I should say they understand it!

ELIZAVETA. Here they're drinking like little sparrows, and in there Bulychov is roaring out things that make you wince.

DOSTIGAYEV. Why is America flourishing? Because the country is run by men of business who constitute the government.

VARVARA. Bettling's Jeanne believes quite seriously that in America cooks go to market in automobiles.

DOSTIGAYEV. That's quite possible. Though I'm sure it's one of those tall stories. And you're still with the military, Varya? Aiming to be under a colonel?

VARVARA. Such a stale joke! What are you dreaming about, Tyatin?

TYATIN. Oh, nothing in particular—

ELIZAVETA (*in front of a mirror*). Yesterday Jeanne told me a marvelous story. A real gem!

DOSTIGAYEV. Come on. Tell us.

ELIZAVETA. Not in the presence of men.

DOSTIGAYEV. The gem must be priceless!

VARVARA *whispers to* ELIZAVETA.

ELIZAVETA. Husband! Are you going to stay here until you've finished this bottle?

DOSTIGAYEV. I'm not in anybody's way.

ELIZAVETA (*to* TYATIN). You know the psalm, Stepan, dear. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners?"

TYATIN. Yes, I recall it vaguely.

ELIZAVETA (*taking him by the arm*). Well, these men here—they are the ungodly sinners, and you are a quiet young man made for the moonlight, love, and that sort of thing. Am I wrong? (*She leads him away.*)

DOSTIGAYEV. Isn't she a chatterbox?

VARVARA. Vassily Yefimovich, Mother and Bashkin have sent out a call for Aunt Melanya.

DOSTIGAYEV. The abbess? Oh, she's a tough customer. She'll be against the firm of Dostigayev and Zvontsov—that's certain. She's for the signboard: Kseniya Bulychova and Dostigayev.

ZVONTSOV. She may insist on pulling out of the business.

DOSTIGAYEV. How much does she have in it? Seventy thousand?

ZVONTSOV. Ninety.

VARVARA. How can one tell?

DOSTIGAYEV. One can. One can find out anything. Look at the Germans. They know not only how many men we have at the front but even how many lice there are on each.

VARVARA. I wish you'd be more serious.

DOSTIGAYEV. My darling Varya. Nobody can trade or fight a war, if he can't count the money in his pocket. Here is the way we can find out about Melanya's money. There's a lady, Sekleteya Poluboyarinova, who takes part in Bishop Nikander's night vigils, and Nikander loves counting his money. In addition, there's a certain man in the diocesan council—we'll keep him in reserve. You have a talk with Poluboyarinova, Varya, and if it turns out that the money belongs to the convent —well, I don't have to explain what that means. Where has my beautiful one disappeared to? *Enter* GLASHA.

GLASHA. You're asked to come to the dining room.

DOSTIGAYEV. Right away. GLASHA *goes out.* Well, let's go. (*He goes off.*)

VARVARA (*stopping as if her skirt has been caught in the chair*). Andrey, help me— Do you believe him?

ZVONTSOV. I'm not such a fool.

VARVARA. Oh, what a crook! It worked quite well though, what I thought up about Melanya. How about Tyatin?

ZVONTSOV. He'll come around. I'll see to that.

VARVARA. You should hurry it up.

ZVONTSOV. Why?

VARVARA. Because you can't get them married for a long time after the funeral—and what with Father's weak heart— Besides, I have other reasons.

They go off as GLASHA *enters. She gazes after them with an expression of hatred and proceeds to clear the table. Enter* YAKOV LAPTEV.

GLASHA. Oh, it's you, Yakov! Yesterday there was a rumor you had been arrested.

LAPTEV. Was there? It was probably wrong.

GLASHA. Joking as usual.

LAPTEV. Well, it's a hungry life, but a merry one.

GLASHA. You'll break your neck with your jokes.

LAPTEV. For good jokes one gets praise, not beatings. If I get it in the neck it'll be for poor joking.

GLASHA. Go on, wag your tongue. Look. Tonya Dostigayeva is with Shura.

LAPTEV. Brr! I certainly don't want her.

GLASHA. Shall I call Shura?

LAPTEV. A good idea. How's Bulychov?

GLASHA (*crossly*). He's your godfather. He's not Bulychov to you.

LAPTEV. Don't be cross, Aunt Glasha.

GLASHA. He's very poorly.

LAPTEV. Is he? Oh, look, Aunt Glasha. My friends have almost nothing to eat. Can you get me some flour? A sack won't be too much.

GLASHA. Am I to steal from my masters to help you?

LAPTEV. But you won't be doing it for the first time. You've sinned before—and it's my sin. The boys want to eat, honestly. And remember, you own more in this house, because of your work, than your masters.

GLASHA. I've heard your tales before. We'll be sending flour to Donat tomorrow morning. You can get a sack from him. (*She goes off.*)

LAPTEV. That's fine. Thank you.

He sits down on the couch, and yawns so heavily that tears come to his eyes. He brushes away the tears and looks around. Enter KSENIYA *mumbling to herself.*

KSENIYA. Everybody's running away like the devil from incense—

LAPTEV. Good afternoon.

KSENIYA. Goodness gracious. What are you sitting here for?

LAPTEV. Must I walk?

KSENIYA. For weeks you can't be found anywhere, then suddenly you turn up—as if you were playing hide-and-seek. Your godfather is ill. But it's nothing to you, it seems.

LAPTEV. Have I got to fall ill, too?

KSENIYA. You've all gone mad, and spread the same madness among others. I hear the Tsar is to be put in a cage as that old rebel Pugachov was. Is that a lie, you know-it-all?

LAPTEV. Everything is possible, everything.

GLASHA *appears at the door.*

GLASHA. Kseniya Yakovlevna, one moment, please.

KSENIYA. Now what do *you* want? Never a minute's peace, oh, God!

She and GLASHA *withdraw. Presently* SHURA *rushes in.*

SHURA. Hello, Yakov!

LAPTEV. Shura dear, I'm going to Moscow but I haven't any money. Help me out.

SHURA. I have thirty rubles.

LAPTEV. Could you make it fifty, eh?

SHURA. I'll get it.

LAPTEV. Tonight, before the train leaves—can you?

SHURA. I will. Listen—is revolution coming?

LAPTEV. It's already come. Don't you read the papers?

SHURA. I don't understand papers.

LAPTEV. Ask Tyatin.

SHURA. Tell me honestly, Yakov—what sort of person is Tyatin?

LAPTEV. Imagine asking me that! Why, you've been seeing him every day for nearly six months.

SHURA. Is he honest?

LAPTEV. Well, yes—he is.

SHURA. Why do you say it so hesitantly?

LAPTEV. He's namby-pamby—and foggy-like—as if life's done him dirt—

SHURA. How?

LAPTEV. Well, he was chucked out of the university in his second year—works as a clerk for his cousin, and his cousin—

SHURA. Zvontsov is a cheat, is he?

LAPTEV. He's a liberal, a Constitutional-Democrat, and those gentry are all that, more or less. You give the money to Glasha—she'll see that I get it.

SHURA. Glasha and Tyatin are helping you?

LAPTEV. In what?

SHURA. Don't hedge, Yashka. You understand me. I want to help too, you hear?

LAPTEV (*surprised*). What's happened, girl? You talk as if you'd just woke up.

SHURA (*in a temper*). Don't dare make fun of me! You're a fool.

LAPTEV. Possibly I am a fool. Still, I'd like to understand—

SHURA. Varvara's coming.

LAPTEV. She's the last person I want to meet.

SHURA. Come—quick!

LAPTEV (*putting his arm around her shoulders*). Really, what's the matter with you?

They go off, locking the door behind them. VARVARA *enters, through another door. She hears the click of the lock, walks over, and tries the handle.*

VARVARA. Is that you, Glasha? (*After a pause.*) Is anybody there? Mysterious—

Walks off quickly. Reënter SHURA, *pulling* DONAT *by the hand.*

DONAT. Where are you dragging me, Shura?

SHURA. Wait! Tell me, is Father respected in town?

DONAT. A rich man is respected everywhere. You're always up to some prank.

SHURA. Do they respect or fear him?

DONAT. If they didn't fear him, they wouldn't respect him.

SHURA. And what do they love him for?

DONAT. What for? I don't know.

SHURA. But you know they love him?

DONAT. Him? Well, coach drivers seem to love him—he never haggles with them—gives them what they ask. And a driver, of course, will pass the word around, and so—

SHURA (*stamping her foot*). Are you laughing at me?

DONAT. What should I do that for? I'm only explaining the truth.

SHURA. You're spiteful. You've become a different man.

DONAT. Me? A different man? It's too late to change at my age.

SHURA. You used to speak well of my father.

DONAT. I'm not running him down now. Each fish has its own scales.

SHURA. You're all liars. *Enter* GLASHA.

DONAT (*looking downcast, and sighing*). Don't get cross, girlie. You can't prove anything by losing your temper.

SHURA. Go away! (*To* GLASHA.) Look, Glasha—oh, somebody's coming—

She hides behind a drape. Enter ALEXEY DOSTIGAYEV. *He is nattily dressed in breeches and a military jacket, with belts and pockets all over him.*

ALEXEY. You're looking better every day, Glasha.

GLASHA (*sullenly*). Pleased to hear it.

ALEXEY. I'm not. (*Stands in her way.*) I don't like anything that's good, if it isn't mine.

GLASHA. Let me go, please.

ALEXEY. Most willingly.

GLASHA *goes off.* ALEXEY *looks at his watch, yawning. Enter* TONYA.

SHURA (*emerging from behind the drape*). You seem to be after maids too.

TONYA. He doesn't care—he might be after fish just as well.

ALEXEY. Maids, if you undress them, are in no way inferior to ladies.

TONYA. Hear that? Nowadays he always talks as if he's been living in a low dive, not at the front.

SHURA. Yes, he used to be just as lazy, but not nearly as brave with words.

ALEXEY. I'm just as brave with deeds.

TONYA. What a liar! He's a coward. He's terribly afraid our stepmother may seduce him. *Enter* TYATIN.

ALEXEY. What are you talking about? Little fool!

TONYA. And he's disgustingly greedy. You know, I pay him a ruble and twenty kopecks for every day he doesn't tell me something nasty. And he takes it.

ALEXEY. How do you like Tonya, Tyatin?

TYATIN. Very much.

SHURA. And me?

TYATIN. To tell the truth—

SHURA. Of course, only the truth.

TYATIN. Not very much.

SHURA. Really? Is that the truth?

TYATIN. Yes.

TONYA. Don't believe him. He repeated it like an echo.

ALEXEY. Look, Tyatin, you should marry Tonya. I'm sick and tired of her.

TONYA. What an idiot! Get out of here. You look like a pregnant laundry woman.

ALEXEY (*putting his arm around* TONYA's *waist*). Oh, such an aristocratic lady! Ne crackez pas les sunflower seeds, c'est mauvais ton.

TONYA. Leave me alone.

ALEXEY. Delighted. (*Dances with her.*)

SHURA. Perhaps you don't like me at all, Tyatin?

TYATIN. Why do you want to know that?

SHURA. I need to. And it interests me.

ALEXEY. Don't be a sluggard. She's as much as asking you to marry her. Today all girls are in a hurry to become the widows of heroes. It brings an extra ration, a halo, and a pension.

TONYA. He's convinced he's being funny.

ALEXEY. Well, I'll be off on my own tack. See me to the door, Tonka.

TONYA. I won't.

ALEXEY. It's something important. Come on, seriously!

TONYA. I'm sure it's something silly. ALEXEY *and* TONYA *go off.*

SHURA. Tyatin, are you truthful?

TYATIN. No.

SHURA. Why not?

TYATIN. It doesn't pay.

SHURA. If you speak like that, you must be truthful. Now tell me straight off—are you being advised to propose to me?

TYATIN (*lighting a cigarette*). I am.

SHURA. And you realize that it's bad advice?

TYATIN. I do.

SHURA. You are— Well, it's a surprise. I thought you—

TYATIN. You must have thought badly of me?

SHURA. No, you're—remarkable. But perhaps you're shy? Perhaps you're playing at truth to pull the wool over my eyes?

TYATIN. That would be beyond my powers. You're clever, vicious, and mischievous, just like your father. Speaking honestly, I'm afraid of you. And you're redheaded too, as Yegor Vassilyevich is—aflame like a torch.

SHURA. Tyatin, you're splendid. Or else you're sly as the devil—

TYATIN. And your face is an extraordinary one—

SHURA. Is that, about my face, to soften the blow? Yes, you are sly.

TYATIN. Think as you will. In my opinion, you're bound to do something—criminal. And I'm accustomed to living with my little paws turned up—you know, like guilty puppies sprawling on their backs.

SHURA. Guilty of what?

TYATIN. I don't know. Of being puppies, perhaps, and not having teeth to bite you with. *Enter* TONYA.

TONYA. That fool brother of mine gave me such a tug on the ear, it still hurts. And he took away all my money, the crook! You know, he'll turn into a regular drunkard, I'm sure of it. He and I are such good-for-nothing merchant-family offspring. You think that's funny?

SHURA. Tonya, I want you to forget all the bad things I said about him.

TONYA. About Tyatin? What did you say? I don't recall.

SHURA. Well, that he wants to propose to me.

TONYA. What's bad about that?

SHURA. For the sake of money.

TONYA. Oh, yes. That's a dirty thing to do, Tyatin.

SHURA. Pity you didn't hear him answering my questions.

TONYA. You've been Warumming him? Remember Schubert's "Warum"?

TYATIN. Is it Schubert's?

TONYA. Warum makes me think of that bird the marabou—such a solemn bird—in Africa.

SHURA. Where on earth do you get such crazy ideas?

TONYA. I'm getting so I like scary things. When you're frightened

you stop being bored. I like to sit in the dark and wait for a huge serpent to crawl in—

TYATIN (*with a snicker*). You mean the one that was in the garden of Eden?

TONYA. No, a more frightful one.

SHURA. You're interesting. You always think up something new, while everybody else talks of nothing but war, Rasputin, the Tsarina, the Germans, the war, revolution—

TONYA. You'll be an actress or a nun.

SHURA. A nun? Nonsense!

TONYA. It's hard to be a nun. You have to play the same role all the time.

SHURA. I want to be a cocotte, like Zola's Nana.

TYATIN. Is that the way you feel? Shame!

SHURA. I want to debauch people, to revenge myself.

TYATIN. On whom? And for what?

SHURA. For being a redhead—for my father's illness—for everything! As soon as the revolution begins, I'll spread my wings—you'll see.

TONYA. You believe there's going to be a revolution?

SHURA. Oh, yes.

TYATIN. There'll certainly be a revolution. *Enter* GLASHA.

GLASHA. Shura, Mother Melanya has arrived. Yegor Vassilyevich wants to see her in here.

SHURA. Oh, that aunt! Let's skip into my room, children. Tyatin, do you have a great respect for your blood-brother Zvontsov?

TYATIN. He's just my cousin.

SHURA. That's no answer.

TYATIN. Relatives, I think, seldom respect one another.

SHURA. Now there's an answer.

TONYA. Stop prattling about dull things.

SHURA. You're very funny, Tyatin.

TYATIN. Can't help it.

SHURA. And you wear funny clothes.

SHURA, TONYA, *and* TYATIN *go off.* GLASHA *opens the door screened by drapes.* BULYCHOV *appears in the door through which the young people have just left.* ABBESS MELANYA, *with an important air, and holding a staff, steps in slowly through the other door.* GLASHA *stands by, with bowed head, holding back the drape.*

MELANYA. You still hanging around, wanton? They haven't driven you out yet? They will, soon.

BULYCHOV. That'll be a chance for you to take her into your nunnery—she has money.

MELANYA. Oh, so you're here? Oh, Yegor, how you've changed, God have mercy on us.

BULYCHOV. Shut the door, Glasha, and tell them not to peep out. Sit down—your Reverence. What business shall we take up?

MELANYA. The doctors aren't much help, are they? You see, the Lord bides His time a day, a year, or even an age—

BULYCHOV. We'll discuss the Lord later. Let's tackle business first. I know you've come to talk about your money.

MELANYA. The money is not mine, it's the cloister's.

BULYCHOV. It's all the same—cloister, oyster, grab all you can. What's worrying you about the money? Afraid if I die, it'll be lost?

MELANYA. It's impossible for it to get lost, but I don't want it falling into strange hands.

BULYCHOV. Then you want to take it out of the business? Take it out—it's all the same to me. But mind you—you'll lose by it. Today rubles breed like lice on the soldiers. And I'm not so sick yet as to die in short order.

MELANYA. We know not the day or the hour when death shall come. Have you made your will?

BULYCHOV. No.

MELANYA. It's time. Make it. The Lord may call you suddenly—

BULYCHOV. What does he want me for?

MELANYA. Leave your impertinences. You know I don't like listening to them, and my position—

BULYCHOV. Oh, chuck it, Melanya. We know each other both by sight and by touch. You can have your money—Bulychov has plenty.

MELANYA. I've no desire to take the capital out of the business, but I want to make out the papers in Kseniya's name. So I'm informing you now.

BULYCHOV. I see. Well, it's your affair. However, if I die, Zvontsov will wipe out Kseniya—and Varvara will help him.

MELANYA. Oh, this is the way you talk now? It sounds new. No spite in it.

BULYCHOV. My spite is turned in another direction. Well, let's now discuss the God-Lord, the soul. "We ruined and robbed in the days of our youth—now that we're old we must look to our souls."

MELANYA. All right. Speak.

BULYCHOV. Well, then. You serve God by day and night, as for example Glasha serves me.

MELANYA. Don't be profane. How does Glasha serve you at night? Are you out of your mind?

BULYCHOV. Want me to tell you?

MELANYA. Don't be profane. Come to your senses.

BULYCHOV. Don't roar. I'm talking to you in plain, human words, not in official prayers. Now, you said to Glasha that she'd soon be fired. You therefore believe that I'll die soon. Why should I? Dostigayev is nine years older than I am, and much more of a swindler too. But he's in good health and will live long. He has a first-class wife. Of course,

I'm a sinner—I've wronged people, and in general, in every way, I've sinned. Well, all people wrong one another—it can't be helped—such is life.

MELANYA. Don't confess your sins before me or anyone else. Do it before God. Men won't forgive, but God is merciful. You know yourself—in the old days highwaymen committed terrible sins, but when they gave unto God what was His they were saved.

BULYCHOV. Oh, yes, of course. If you steal and make a gift to the church, you're not a thief, you're a godly man.

MELANYA. Yegor! You're blaspheming. I won't go on listening to you. You're not stupid—you must understand if the Lord doesn't permit, the devil won't seduce.

BULYCHOV. Thanks.

MELANYA. What do you mean by that?

BULYCHOV. You've reassured me. It turns out that the Lord is quite willing to let the devil seduce us—so when I sin, he's a party to it with the devil and myself.

MELANYA (*rising*). These words—these words of yours are such that if I report them to Bishop Nikander—

BULYCHOV. But what have I said that's wrong?

MELANYA. Heretic! Do you realize what heathenish ideas have got into your sick brain? Don't you understand that if God lets the devil seduce you, it means he's renounced you?

BULYCHOV. Renounced me, has he? Why? Because I cared for money, love women, married your fool of a sister for her money, was your lover—for all that he's renounced me? Oh, you big-mouthed crow—you just croak—without thinking.

MELANYA. What are you saying, Yegor? Have you gone mad? Merciful God!

BULYCHOV. You pray day and night under the bells, but who you're praying to you don't know yourself.

MELANYA. Yegor! You're hurtling into an abyss, into the jaws of Hell. And at such a time! Everything is being destroyed, the Tsar's throne is tottering before the forces of evil—it's the antichrist's hour, and the Day of Judgment is probably near—

BULYCHOV. Something to worry about, indeed! The Day of Judgment—the Second Advent— You crow! You fly in, set up a croaking. Go back to your den to kiss your choir girls. And as for your money, all you'll get from me is this! (*He makes an offensive gesture with his fingers.*)

MELANYA (*astounded, almost falls into her chair*). Oh, you miserable wretch!

BULYCHOV. You said Glasha is a wanton. And you? What are you?

MELANYA. It's a lie! It's a lie! (*Jumping to her feet.*) You're a crook! You'll die like a dog soon! Worm!

BULYCHOV. Get out—or I don't know what I'll do to you!

MELANYA. Snake! Devil! (*Rushes out.*)

BULYCHOV (*rubbing his right side, growls to himself, then shouts*). Glasha! Hey, there! *Enter* KSENIYA.

KSENIYA. What's the matter? Where's Melanya?

BULYCHOV. She's flown away.

KSENIYA (*sitting down*). Surely you didn't quarrel again?

BULYCHOV. Have you settled down here for long?

KSENIYA. I wish you'd let me say a word, Yegor. You no longer talk to me. I might just as well be a piece of furniture. Why are you looking at me like that?

BULYCHOV. Go on, fire away.

KSENIYA. The things that are going on in our house! As if the world has come to an end. Our dear son-in-law has practically turned his place upstairs into an inn. Visitors mill around there from morning till night, conferences are held. I don't know what about— Yesterday they drank seven bottles of red wine and heaven knows how much vodka. Ismail, the janitor, is complaining—the police are worrying him to death asking him who the people are that come to our house. And they talk upstairs about the Tsar, about the government— And so every day—a regular inn. Why do you hang your head?

BULYCHOV. Talk away! When I was young I loved to sit in an inn, drinking and listening to music.

KSENIYA. What did Melanya come for?

BULYCHOV. You're a bad hand at lying, Kseniya—too stupid to do it well.

KSENIYA. What did I lie about, when?

BULYCHOV. Right now. Melanya called by prearrangement with you to talk about money.

KSENIYA. When did I arrange with her? Where did you get that idea?

BULYCHOV. Well, let's forget it. Shut up.

DOSTIGAYEV, ZVONTSOV, *and* FATHER PAVLIN *enter animatedly.*

DOSTIGAYEV. Yegor, hear the news Father Pavlin has brought from Moscow.

KSENIYA. You should lie down, Yegor.

BULYCHOV. I'm listening—Father.

PAVLIN. There's little good that I can tell you. And even the good, as I see it, is bad, since it's impossible to think up anything better than the way we lived before the war.

DOSTIGAYEV. No, I protest. No and again no!

ZVONTSOV *and* KSENIYA *have been whispering to each other.*

KSENIYA. Is she crying?

DOSTIGAYEV. Is who crying?

KSENIYA. Our Abbess.

DOSTIGAYEV. What's wrong with her?

BULYCHOV. Go see what's frightened her. Sit down, Father, and let's have it.

DOSTIGAYEV. I'd like to know what Melanya finds so touching that it's reduced her to tears.

KSENIYA, ZVONTSOV, *and* DOSTIGAYEV *go off.*

PAVLIN. A great confusion is reigning in Moscow. Even people of ripe intelligence assert that the Tsar must be removed because of his incompetence.

BULYCHOV. He was competent enough for over twenty years.

PAVLIN. A man's powers wear off with the passing of time.

BULYCHOV. In 1913, when the Romanovs celebrated their tercentenary, the Tsar shook my hand. The whole nation was filled with joy —the whole of our city.

PAVLIN. So it was.The people were filled with joy.

BULYCHOV. What's happened? We still have the Duma— No, the trouble is not with the Tsar, it lies at the root of things—

PAVLIN. And the root is the autocracy.

BULYCHOV. I understand autocracy means self-might. Well, everybody keeps himself going by his own might. Only where is this might? There's none in the war, it appears.

PAVLIN. The Duma has contributed to its destruction.

ELIZAVETA *appears at the door.*

ELIZAVETA. Are you having confession, Father Pavlin?

PAVLIN. Certainly not. What a question!

ELIZAVETA. And where's my husband?

PAVLIN. He was here a while ago.

ELIZAVETA. You *are* very stern today, Father Pavlin. (*She disappears.*)

BULYCHOV. Father—

PAVLIN. I'm listening.

BULYCHOV. Everybody's a father. God is a father, the Tsar is a father, you're a father, I'm a father. But we have no power. We all live to die. I'm not speaking of myself. I'm speaking of the war, the great death. It's like seeing a tiger let loose among the people at a circus.

PAVLIN. You should calm yourself, Yegor Vassilyevich.

BULYCHOV. Calm myself with what? Who can calm me? You? Well, try it—Father. Show your powers.

PAVLIN. You should read the Holy Scripture, the Bible. It's a good thing to recall Joshua and Jericho. War is in the Law.

BULYCHOV. Go on. That's no law—that's a fairy tale. Stop the sun? You can't do it. It's a lie.

PAVLIN. Complaining is the worst sin. One has to accept retribution for our sinful life with peace in our hearts, humbly.

BULYCHOV. Did you bear up under it when the warden, Alexey Gubin, wronged you? You took him to court, asked Zvontsov to be your lawyer, got the Archbishop to speak for you. And to what court

shall I complain against my illness? Against my premature death? Do you mean to tell me you'll die humbly, with peace in your heart? No, you'll groan and yell.

PAVLIN. As a priest I refuse to listen to such speeches. Because these are speeches—

BULYCHOV. Cut it out, Pavlin. You're a man. Your vestment is like paint on one's body. Underneath, you're a human being, the same as I am. The Doctor says your heart is bad, a case of fatty degeneration—

PAVLIN. What can such speeches lead to? Ponder it and be afraid. It has been established from time immemorial—

BULYCHOV. Established, but not too firmly, it seems.

PAVLIN. Leo Tolstoy was a heretic and had anathema pronounced on him for his defection, but when he was facing death he ran away into the woods like a wild beast. *Enter* KSENIYA.

KSENIYA. Yegor Vassilyevich, Mokey has come— He says the police arrested Yakov last night, and asks—

BULYCHOV. Well, thank you, Father Pavlin—for your sermon! I'll have—to trouble you later. Call in Bashkin, Kseniya. Tell Glasha to bring me some porridge and—orange brandy. PAVLIN *goes off.*

KSENIYA. You mustn't have brandy.

BULYCHOV. I can have anything. Go.

KSENIYA *leaves the room.* BULYCHOV *looks around and murmurs to himself, with a snicker.*

Father—Pavlin—what an owl! Yegor, old fellow, you ought to smoke —it's easier with smoke in your eyes—you can't see everything.

Enter BASHKIN.

Well, how is it, Mokey?

BASHKIN. How are you feeling, Yegor Vassilyevich?

BULYCHOV. Much better. Yakov has been arrested?

BASHKIN. Yes, last night. Hell of a business!

BULYCHOV. Only he?

BASHKIN. I hear they also got some watchmaker, the schoolteacher Kalmykova who used to give lessons to your daughter Shura, the stoker Yerikhonov, a well-known agitator—altogether about a dozen, they say.

BULYCHOV. All of that crowd—Down with the Tsar?

BASHKIN. They're of different kinds. Some want to do away with the Tsar, others—with all the rich people so that the workers should rule the state—

BULYCHOV. Fiddlesticks!

BASHKIN. That's what I say.

BULYCHOV. They'll drink up the wealth of the state.

BASHKIN. Sure they will.

BULYCHOV. Yes. But suppose they don't.

BASHKIN. What can they do without masters?

BULYCHOV. Truly said. How can anybody live without you or Dostigayev?

BASHKIN. You too are a master.

BULYCHOV. So I am, naturally. What is it they sing?

BASHKIN (*with a sigh*). Let us renounce the old world—

BULYCHOV. Go on.

BASHKIN. Let us shake its dust from our feet—

BULYCHOV. The words sound like a prayer.

BASHKIN. I wouldn't say that. The song says: We hate the Tsar – the palace—

BULYCHOV. H'm! The scoundrels! (*Pauses.*) Well, what do you want? GLASHA *brings in porridge and vodka*

BASHKIN. Me? Nothing.

BULYCHOV. What have you come for then?

BASHKIN. Just to ask who I should put in Yakov's place.

BULYCHOV. Get Potapov.

BASHKIN. He's of the same way of thinking—neither God, nor Tsar—

BULYCHOV. Is he?

BASHKIN. Allow me to suggest Mokrousov. He's been asking for a job with us— He's had some education, knows how to go about things—

GLASHA. Your porridge will get cold.

BULYCHOV. That policeman—that thief? What's the matter with him?

BASHKIN. It's dangerous on the police force nowadays. Many of them are giving up their jobs.

BULYCHOV. I see—it's dangerous. The fleeing rats—all right, send me Potapov—tomorrow morning. You can go now. Has the tuba player come, Glasha? BASHKIN *goes off.*

GLASHA. He's waiting in the kitchen.

BULYCHOV. When I finish the porridge, show him in. Why is it so quiet in the house?

GLASHA. Everybody's upstairs.

BULYCHOV (*drinking the vodka*). It's just as well. What makes you look so sad?

GLASHA. Oh, if you'd only stop drinking and injuring yourself! Get better, Yegor! Give up everything and get away from them. They'll eat you up alive—they will, like worms. Let's go to Siberia—

BULYCHOV. Let go—you're hurting me.

GLASHA. In Siberia I'll work. What good is your staying here? Nobody loves you, everybody's waiting for your death—

BULYCHOV. Stop it, Glasha. Don't upset me. I know and see everything. I know what you are to me— You and Shura are my only gain

in life, everyone else would rather I weren't alive at all. I may get better yet. Come on, call in the tuba player.

GLASHA. Please eat your porridge.

BULYCHOV. To the devil with it. Call Shura too.

GLASHA *goes off.* BULYCHOV, *alone, avidly drinks one glass of vodka after another.* GLASHA *returns, showing in the* TUBA PLAYER, *a skinny man looking pitiful and funny, carrying a bag with the tuba on a strap over his shoulder.*

TUBA PLAYER. Wishing you good health, sir.

BULYCHOV (*looking at him with surprise*). What do you know! Well, sit down. Shut the door, Glasha. So this is what you look like.

TUBA PLAYER. Yes, sir.

BULYCHOV. Well, you're hardly a treat. Now, let's hear about your healing methods.

TUBA PLAYER. My method is simple, sir. Only, people are accustomed to taking drugstore medicines and don't believe me—so I have to ask to be paid in advance.

BULYCHOV. That's a good idea. But does your cure work?

TUBA PLAYER. I've cured hundreds.

BULYCHOV. That hasn't made you rich, though.

TUBA PLAYER. One doesn't get rich doing people good.

BULYCHOV. Oh, you've found that out! Well, what diseases do you cure?

TUBA PLAYER. All diseases are the result of bad air in the stomach—so I treat them all.

BULYCHOV (*with a light laugh*). A brave man. Come, let's see your horn.

TUBA PLAYER. Will you pay me a ruble?

BULYCHOV. A ruble? All right. Have you a ruble, Glasha? Here you are. You're too cheap.

TUBA PLAYER. That's to start with. (*Unties his bag and brings out his tuba.*) SHURA *runs in.*

BULYCHOV. What a samovar of a horn. How do you like the healer, Shura? Well, blow.

The TUBA PLAYER *clears his throat, plays the tuba not too loudly, and coughs again.*

Is that all?

TUBA PLAYER. You do it four times a day for five minutes, and it's all over.

BULYCHOV. The man blows himself out and dies?

TUBA PLAYER. Oh, never. I've cured hundreds.

BULYCHOV. So. Now tell me the truth—what do you regard yourself as—a fool or a crook?

TUBA PLAYER. And you don't believe me either—just like everybody else.

BULYCHOV (*chuckling*). Don't put your horn away. Tell me honestly —are you a fool or a crook? I'll give you money for that.

SHURA. You mustn't offend the poor fellow, Father.

BULYCHOV. I'm not offending him, Shura. What's your name, healer?

TUBA PLAYER. Gabriel Uvekov.

BULYCHOV. Gabriel? (*Laughs.*) By Jove! Are you really Gabriel?

TUBA PLAYER. It's a very simple name—nobody else laughs at it.

BULYCHOV. Come on then. Are you stupid or are you a cheat?

TUBA PLAYER. Will you give me sixteen rubles?

BULYCHOV. Bring the money, Glasha. It's in the bedroom. But why sixteen, Gabriel?

TUBA PLAYER. I made a mistake. I should have asked for more.

BULYCHOV. Then you are stupid?

TUBA PLAYER. No, I'm not a fool.

BULYCHOV. Then you are a crook?

TUBA PLAYER. Not a crook either. You know yourself—a man can't make a living without cheating.

BULYCHOV. Perfectly right. It's wrong but right, old fellow.

SHURA. Isn't it a shameful thing to do—cheat people?

TUBA PLAYER. Why shameful, if they believe me?

BULYCHOV (*excitedly*). And this too is true. Do you understand, Shura? It's true. That priest of ours won't say that. He won't dare.

TUBA PLAYER. You should give me more for telling the truth. But —I swear to God—(*he crosses himself*) the horn does help some people.

BULYCHOV. He's right. Give him twenty-five, Glasha. Give more—all you've got.

TUBA PLAYER. Many humble thanks! But perhaps you will try the horn? God knows how it works, but, it helps, honest.

BULYCHOV. No, thank you. Oh, Gabriel, Gabriel! (*Laughs.*) You know what? You show me how it works. Come on, blow it—and lay it on as thick as you can.

The TUBA PLAYER *produces tense and deafening sounds.* GLASHA *looks at* BULYCHOV *with alarm.* SHURA *laughs, closing her ears.*

Go all out!

The DOSTIGAYEVS, *the* ZVONTSOVS, KSENIYA, *and* BASHKIN *burst into the room.*

VARVARA. What's going on, Father?

KSENIYA. Yegor—what are you up to this time?

ZVONTSOV (*to the* TUBA PLAYER). Are you drunk?

BULYCHOV. Don't you dare touch him! Give it to them, Gabriel! Why, this is Archangel Gabriel trumpeting the end of the world!

KSENIYA. Oh, my God, he's lost his reason!

BASHKIN (*to* ZVONTSOV). You see?

SHURA. Do you hear, Father? They say you've gone mad. Go away, trumpeter, go away!

BULYCHOV. Don't go, Gabriel! Give it to them with all you've got. This is the Day of Judgment, the end of the world! Blow, Gabriel!

CURTAIN

ACT III

The dining room. Everything in it seems to have been moved out of position. On the table are dirty dishes, a samovar, wine bottles, store packages. In the corner stand several traveling cases. One of them is being unpacked by TAISYA, MELANYA'S *servant, who wears a pointed cap. Beside her is* GLASHA *holding a tray. A hanging lamp over the table is lit.*

GLASHA. Is Mother Melanya going to stay here long?

TAISYA. I don't know.

GLASHA. Why didn't she stop at the convent hostelry?

TAISYA. I don't know.

GLASHA. How old are you?

TAISYA. Nineteen. ZVONTSOV *is coming down the stairs.*

GLASHA. And you don't know a thing. You're growing up sort of wild.

TAISYA. We're not allowed to talk to lay people.

ZVONTSOV. Has the Abbess had tea?

GLASHA. No.

ZVONTSOV. Go heat the samovar in case she wants some.

GLASHA *lifts the samovar and carries it out.*

So you were frightened by soldiers?

TAISYA. Yes, sir.

ZVONTSOV. What did they do to frighten you?

TAISYA. They killed a cow and threatened to set fire to the convent. Excuse me.

She goes off, carrying a heap of linen. VARVARA *appears in the hall.*

VARVARA (*from the hall*). What sloppy weather! Are you having a chat with the nun? (*She enters.*)

ZVONTSOV. You know, it's an awkward thing having the Abbess in our house.

VARVARA. The house isn't ours yet. Has Tyatin agreed about Shura?

ZVONTSOV. Tyatin is an ass, or he's shamming being an honest man.

VARVARA. Wait. I seem to hear Father shouting. (*Listens at the door leading to* BULYCHOV'S *room.*)

ZVONTSOV. I don't know, the doctors say he's perfectly sane, but after that idiotic scene with the tuba player—

VARVARA. He's pulled worse scenes than that. Shura and Tyatin seem to have become quite friendly, haven't they?

ZVONTSOV. They have. But I see little good in that. Your sister is a sly thing—she's capable of doing something extremely unpleasant.

VARVARA. It's a pity you didn't think of that when she flirted with you. Well, you enjoyed it anyway.

ZVONTSOV. She flirted with me only to tease you.

VARVARA. How annoying for you! Oh, here's Pavlin heading this way. He's making a habit of it.

ZVONTSOV. Yes, the house is full of priesthood.

Enter ELIZAVETA *and* PAVLIN, *arguing, to be followed shortly afterward by* BASHKIN.

PAVLIN. The newspapers are lying as usual. Good evening.

ELIZAVETA. And I'm telling you it's true.

PAVLIN. It has been established beyond any doubt—the Emperor abdicated not of his own free will, but yielding to force, having been captured on his way to Petrograd by members of the liberal party. Yes!

ZVONTSOV. Well, what are we to conclude from this?

ELIZAVETA. Father Pavlin is against revolution and in favor of war. I'm against the war. I want to go to Paris. We've had enough fighting. You agree with me, Varvara? Remember what Henry IV said? Paris is better than war. I know he didn't put it in those words, but he was right.

PAVLIN. I don't insist on anything, since everything is tottering.

VARVARA. We need peace, peace, Father Pavlin. You see how the mob is behaving?

PAVLIN. Alas, I do! But how's our patient? How is he up here? (*He puts his finger to his head.*)

ZVONTSOV. The doctors have found no signs of disorder.

PAVLIN. I'm glad to hear it. Although the only things doctors find without fail is their fees.

ELIZAVETA. A spiteful man! Jeanne has invited us to supper, Varvara.

BASHKIN. They've released political prisoners, and the police are suffering greater losses than ever.

PAVLIN. That's right. It's most extraordinary. Do you expect anything good from these present events, Andrey Petrovich?

ZVONTSOV. The public forces are in the process of steady organization and will soon have their say. By public forces I mean people who have a firm economic—

VARVARA (*to* ZVONTSOV). Listen, Jeanne has asked us up— (*Draws him aside.*)

ZVONTSOV. That puts me in a rather awkward position, you know. An Abbess on one side, a cocotte on the other—

VARVARA. Not so loud!

BASHKIN. Andrey Petrovich, Mokrousov is here, that police sub-inspector, you know him, don't you?

ZVONTSOV. Yes. What does he want?

BASHKIN. He's giving up his job on account of the times being so dangerous and is asking for a job in our forest station.

ZVONTSOV. Would it be the proper thing to do?

VARVARA. Wait, Andrey—

BASHKIN. Certainly. Yakov Laptev will get up on his hind legs now and start stirring up trouble, and Donat, you know yourself, is not a suitable man for us. Besides he's a sectarian—keeps mumbling about the law of truth, and what use is it talking truth when—well, you can see for yourself—

ZVONTSOV. That's nonsense! What we're witnessing is precisely the beginning of the triumph of truth—

VARVARA. Wait, Andrey, will you?

ZVONTSOV. And justice.

VARVARA. What is it you want, Mokey?

BASHKIN. I say we should hire Mokrousov. I spoke about him to Yegor Vassilyevich.

VARVARA. What did he say? ZVONTSOV *moves away, frowning.*

BASHKIN. Nothing definite.

VARVARA. You hire Mokrousov.

BASHKIN. Maybe you'll have a look at him?

VARVARA. What for?

BASHKIN. To get acquainted. He's here.

VARVARA. Very well.

BASHKIN *goes off into the hall.* VARVARA *jots something down in her notebook.* BASHKIN *returns with* MOKROUSOV, *a round-faced man, with eyebrows raised in surprise, and a smile on his lips, yet looking as if he were about to burst out cursing; he is dressed in a policeman's uniform and carries a revolver on his hip; entering, he clicks his heels.*

MOKROUSOV. How d'you do, ma'am? I'm deeply grateful for the privilege of serving you.

VARVARA. I'm very glad. You're still in uniform, and I've heard they're disarming the police.

MOKROUSOV. So they are. It's dangerous for us to walk about the streets looking as usual so I wear a civil overcoat, though I still carry arms. Today, however, because of the unfounded hopes which have been aroused, the mob has quieted down and so I've dispensed with my sword.

VARVARA. When do you propose to take up your work with us?

MOKROUSOV. In my mind I've been your humble servant for a long time. I'm ready to go to the station as early as tomorrow. I'm a single man—

VARVARA. Do you think the rioting will last long?

MOKROUSOV. I believe all through the summer. Then rains and cold weather will come, and it'll stop people from fooling around in the streets.

VARVARA. Only during the summer? I hardly think revolution depends on the weather.

MOKROUSOV. Good heavens! Of course it does. Winter cools things off.

VARVARA (*smiling*). You're an optimist.

MOKROUSOV. We of the police are always optimists.

VARVARA. Really?

MOKROUSOV. It's a fact. We realize our strength.

VARVARA. You served in the army?

MOKROUSOV. Yes, ma'am. In the Buzuluk reserve battalion. I hold the rank of sublieutenant.

VARVARA (*offering her hand*). Well, I wish you luck.

MOKROUSOV (*kissing her hand*). I am touched. (*He backs out of the room with heavy steps.*)

VARVARA (*to* BASHKIN). He's a fool, wouldn't you say?

BASHKIN. That's no drawback. Look what the clever ones are doing. If you let them have their way they'll turn the earth inside out—like a pocket.

PAVLIN (*to* BASHKIN *and* ELIZAVETA). The priesthood must be given the right of free preachment, or nothing good will ever come out of it.

Enter BULYCHOV *supported by* GLASHA *and* SHURA. *Everybody falls silent as they all gaze at him. A frown comes over his face.*

BULYCHOV. Well? Why have you stopped talking? You've been chattering all the time—

PAVLIN. We've been taken aback by the sudden spectacle—

BULYCHOV. Of what?

PAVLIN. Of a man being led—

BULYCHOV. Being led! When a man loses control of his legs he is led. Mokey, has Yakov been released?

BASHKIN. Yes. All prisoners have been released.

ZVONTSOV. The political ones.

BULYCHOV. Yakov Laptev is set free, and the Tsar is put under arrest. There, Father Pavlin. What do you say to that?

PAVLIN. I'm unversed in these matters. But, in my small comprehension of them, I'd first like to inquire what the intentions of these people are both in speech and deeds.

BULYCHOV. They'll elect a new tsar. Without a tsar you'll be fighting like dogs.

PAVLIN. You have an animated face today—evidently you're overcoming your malady?

BULYCHOV. That's it—overcoming it. You husbands and wives, and you, Mokey, please leave me to talk to Pavlin. You stay here, Shura.

BASHKIN *goes out into the hall. The rest go upstairs. A minute or*

two later VARVARA *comes halfway down the steps and stops to listen.*

SHURA. You'd better lie down.

BULYCHOV. I don't want to. Well, Father Pavlin, is it about the belfry?

PAVLIN. No. I've dropped in in the hope of seeing you feeling better, and I wasn't wrong. But, of course, remembering your liberal and big-hearted deeds in the past, deeds which were directed to the betterment of the city and our church—

BULYCHOV. You don't pray well for me. My health, you see, is getting worse every day, so I don't feel like paying God. Why should I pay him, for what? I've paid plenty, but what good has it done me?

PAVLIN. Your contributions—

BULYCHOV. Wait. I have a question—isn't God ashamed of himself? Why is death?

SHURA. Don't speak of death—please.

BULYCHOV. Keep quiet—and listen. I'm not talking about myself.

PAVLIN. You shouldn't upset yourself with such thoughts. And what can death mean when the soul is immortal?

BULYCHOV. But why is it squeezed into dirty, tight flesh?

PAVLIN. The Church regards this question as not only idle but also—

VARVARA, *on the staircase, tries to smother her laughter with a handkerchief.*

BULYCHOV. Don't hiccup! Speak right out. Do you remember the tuba player, Shura?

PAVLIN. In the presence of this young lady—

BULYCHOV. Come off it. She has to live—so she has to know. I've lived long enough and now I ask you: What do you live for?

PAVLIN. I serve in a house of God.

BULYCHOV. I know you serve. But one day you'll have to die. What does it mean? What does our death mean, Pavlin?

PAVLIN. Your questioning is illogical and futile. And—forgive me—it's not of earthly things you ought to be thinking now—

SHURA. You mustn't speak like that!

BULYCHOV. I'm earthly through and through.

PAVLIN (*rising*). Earth is dust.

BULYCHOV. Dust, you say? Then you lousy— Then you must remember yourself that earth is dust. Dust, but you wear a silk cassock. Dust, but you have a gilded cross. Dust, but you're greedy for everything—

PAVLIN. You're saying evil and baleful things in the presence of a virgin—

BULYCHOV. A virgin—a burgeon—

VARVARA *hastens up the steps.*

They train you fools as dogs are trained to hunt hares. You've grown rich on penniless Christ—

PAVLIN. Your illness has made you bitter, and in your bitterness you roar like a wild boar— (*He goes off.*)

BULYCHOV. You're leaving? Aha!

SHURA. You shouldn't excite yourself, it only makes you feel worse. You're so unmanageable.

BULYCHOV. Never mind. There's nothing to lose. Oh, how I dislike this priest! You keep your eyes and ears open. I have a purpose in all this.

SHURA. I see everything myself— I'm no child, nor a fool.

ZVONTSOV *appears on the stairs.*

BULYCHOV. After that tuba player they've decided I've gone mad. But the doctors say it's a lie! You do believe the doctors, Shura, don't you?

SHURA. I believe you.

BULYCHOV. That's the girl! No sir, my brain is working all right. The doctors know. It's true, I stumbled on something sharp. But everybody is interested to know: What is death? Or again: What is life? You understand?

SHURA. I don't believe you're dangerously ill. What you need is to go away from here. Glasha's right about that. You must have thorough medical care. But you don't listen to anybody.

BULYCHOV. I listen to everybody. There's that woman healer, for instance—I'll try her too. What if she helps? It's time she was here. Ah, that gnawing pain—it's like anguish in the heart.

SHURA. Please, Father dear. Don't go on like this. Lie down.

BULYCHOV. I feel worse lying. Once you lie down, you give up the fight, you surrender. Besides, I want to talk. I have to tell you something. It's a funny case—I live on the wrong street, so to speak. I fell in with people not of my kind, and for thirty years I've had nobody but strangers around me. I don't want the same thing to happen to you. My father was a poor craftsman. And I—I don't know how to make clear what I mean.

SHURA. Speak more quietly, more calmly. Talk to me as you used to when you told me fairy tales.

BULYCHOV. I never told you fairy tales. I always spoke to you of true things. You see—those priests, tsars, governors—what the hell do I need them for? I don't believe in God either. Where do you find him here? You see yourself. Nor are there good people to be found. Good people are as rare as—counterfeit coins. You see what everybody's like, don't you? Now they've all got themselves into a mess, into a war—have gone stark, staring mad. What do I care? What good are they to Yegor Bulychov? And to you too—how will you be able to live with them?

SHURA. You shouldn't worry about me. *Enter* KSENIYA.

KSENIYA. Shura, there are visitors to see you—Tonya with her brother, and that other—

SHURA. Let them wait.

KSENIYA. You'd better go. Your father and I have got to have a talk.

BULYCHOV. Are you sure I have to?

SHURA. Don't talk to him too much.

KSENIYA. Teaching me what to do? Yegor Vassilyevich, Zobunova, the healer, has come.

BULYCHOV. Come back later, Shura, and bring the young people along. Well, go get Zobunova. SHURA *goes off.*

KSENIYA. In a minute. I want to tell you about Shura. She's become friendly with that good-for-nothing, Andrey's cousin. You understand he's not the right man for her. We've taken one pauper under our roof—and how he lords it over us now!

BULYCHOV. Really, Kseniya, you're like a bad dream.

KSENIYA. God forgive your insults. You ought to forbid her to play around with Tyatin.

BULYCHOV. Anything else?

KSENIYA. Melanya's here.

BULYCHOV. What for?

KSENIYA. A misfortune has befallen her. Some army deserters attacked her convent, killed a cow, stole two hatchets, a pick ax, some lengths of rope—what's the world coming to! And Donat, our forester, is being hospitable to bad characters—they live in the workers' barracks at the lumber mill.

BULYCHOV. I notice any man I like is disliked by everybody else.

KSENIYA. You ought to make up with her.

BULYCHOV. With Melanya? What for?

KSENIYA. Why, naturally, for the sake of your health—

BULYCHOV. All right, I'll make up with her. I'll say to her: "And forgive us our debts"—

KSENIYA. Be kind to her. (*She goes off.*)

BULYCHOV (*muttering to himself*). And forgive us our debts—as we forgive— Lies everywhere! The devils! *Enter* VARVARA.

VARVARA. Father, I heard Mother talking to you about Stepan Tyatin.

BULYCHOV. Yes, you hear everything, know everything.

VARVARA. Tyatin is a modest young man. He won't demand a big dowry with Shura and he'll make a good match for her.

BULYCHOV. You *are* considerate—

VARVARA. I've been taking a good look at him—

BULYCHOV. But considerate of whom? Oh, you family devils!

Enter MELANYA *and* KSENIYA. TAISYA *stops at the door.*

Well, Melanya. Let's make up, shall we?

MELANYA. Singing another tune! A warrior! You hurt everybody's feelings for no good reason.

BULYCHOV. "And forgive us our debts," Melanya!

MELANYA. Debts have nothing to do with it. Behave yourself. Look

what's going on in the country. Our Tsar anointed by God has been dethroned. Do you realize what that means? Our Lord has thrown the darkness of confusion over his people, and they have all lost their reason, and with their own hands are digging the ground from under their feet. The mob is rioting. The village women in Koposovo shouted to my face, "We are the people! Our husbands, the soldiers, are the people!" Can you imagine that? Since when have soldiers come to be regarded as the people!

KSENIYA. Yakov Laptev is preaching all that—

MELANYA. They've deprived the Governor of his powers, and have put the notary public Osmolovsky in his place—

BULYCHOV. Another fat one.

MELANYA. Yesterday Bishop Nikander was saying: We live on the eve of devastating events. How can there be such a thing as civil authority? It's impossible. Since biblical times peoples have been ruled by a hand armed with a sword and the cross.

BULYCHOV. In biblical times there was no worship of the cross.

MELANYA. Keep quiet, you brainy one. The Gospels are part of the Bible and come in the same binding. And the cross is a sword. A critic! The Bishop knows better than you do what was worshiped and when. You, seekers after glory, you rejoice at the downfall of the throne. Watch out lest your joy turn into bitter tears. Yegor dear, I want to have a private talk with you.

BULYCHOV. Won't we quarrel again that way? Though, of course, we can have a talk, only later. The woman healer is coming presently. I want to get better, Melanya.

MELANYA. Zobunova is a famous healer. She's way ahead of the doctors. Afterward have a talk with the possessed innocent Propotey.

BULYCHOV. They say he's a faker?

MELANYA. No, no. How can you? You must see him—

BULYCHOV. Well, let's have Propotey too. I feel better today somehow—except for my legs. And gayer too. Somehow everything is funny, looks funny. Call in the healer woman, Kseniya. KSENIYA *goes off.*

MELANYA. Oh, Yegor—there's still a lot of the old stuff in you.

BULYCHOV. You're right there, and a good thing there is a lot of it.

KSENIYA *returns.*

KSENIYA. She says everybody must leave the room.

MELANYA. Well, we'd better go.

Everybody goes out except BULYCHOV, *who sits smiling and rubbing his chest and side. Enter* ZOBUNOVA *quietly. Acting as if she were alone but actually intent on attracting* BULYCHOV'S *attention, she twists her mouth, blows out to the right, and, pressing her right hand to her heart, moves her left hand like a fish's fin, as if waving somebody away. As she stops, she passes her right hand over her face.*

BULYCHOV. Are you praying to the devils?

ZOBUNOVA (*in a singsong voice*). Oh, you evil ailments, you sufferings of the flesh. Move away, roll away, go away from this servant of the Lord. This day and this hour I drive you away with my strong word for ever and ever. Good evening, kindly man, called Yegor.

BULYCHOV. Good evening, Auntie. Were you driving away the devils?

ZOBUNOVA. Whatever are you saying? How can one have dealings with them?

BULYCHOV. When one has to, one can. Priests pray to God. You're not a priest, so you must pray to the devils.

ZOBUNOVA. I don't know where you get these frightful notions. Only stupid people spread stories about me being in with the evil ones.

BULYCHOV. In that case, Auntie, you'll be wasting your breath. Priests have prayed to God for me—but he's refused to help me.

ZOBUNOVA. You're just having your joke, kind man. That's only because you don't believe in me.

BULYCHOV. I would believe in you if you came from the devils. You know, of course—you're sure to have heard it—I'm a loose man, a man harsh with people, greedy for money—

ZOBUNOVA. I've heard that, but I don't believe you'll grudge giving me a little gift.

BULYCHOV. I'm a great sinner, Auntie, and God doesn't care about me. God has washed his hands of Yegor Bulychov. So, if you're not in cahoots with the devils, you'd better go and perform your abortions —that's your trade, isn't it?

ZOBUNOVA. My, my! Truly do people say you are a pushing, mischievous man!

BULYCHOV. Well? What lies do you want to tell? Fire away.

ZOBUNOVA. I know nothing of lies. Tell me what hurts you, how it hurts you, where.

BULYCHOV. My belly hurts me, very painfully—right here.

ZOBUNOVA. You see—but don't tell anybody, no—not a soul!

BULYCHOV. I won't tell—don't worry.

ZOBUNOVA. There are yellow ailments and there are black ones. Even a doctor can cure a yellow ailment. But a black one—no prayers by either a priest or a monk can ever cure that. The black one—that comes from the evil spirits, and there's only one remedy for it.

BULYCHOV. Kill or cure—is that it?

ZOBUNOVA. The remedy is an expensive one.

BULYCHOV. Naturally. I understand.

ZOBUNOVA. Here you really have to deal with the evil spirits.

BULYCHOV. With Satan himself.

ZOBUNOVA. Well, not directly with him, but still—

BULYCHOV. Can you do it?

ZOBUNOVA. Only not a word to anybody.

BULYCHOV. Go to hell, Auntie!

ZOBUNOVA. Wait a moment—

BULYCHOV. Get out—or I'll let you have it—

ZOBUNOVA. Please listen to me—

GLASHA (*from the hall*). You heard him—go! (GLASHA *enters.*)

ZOBUNOVA. Well, I never! Who do you think you are?

BULYCHOV. Put her out!

GLASHA. You have a nerve—making out you're a witch!

ZOBUNOVA. You're a witch yourself—with such a face, too! Oh, what people! May you have neither sleep nor rest!

ZOBUNOVA *and* GLASHA *go off.* BULYCHOV *looks around and gives a deep sigh. Enter* MELANYA *and* KSENIYA.

MELANYA. So you didn't like Zobunova? She didn't please you?

BULYCHOV *remains silent, gazing at her.*

KSENIYA. She has a hot temper—been overpraised, and it's given her a swelled head.

BULYCHOV. What do you think, Melanya—does God have the belly-ache?

MELANYA. Stop clowning!

BULYCHOV. I'm sure Christ had it. He subsisted on fish—

MELANYA. Stop it, Yegor. Don't provoke me. *Enter* GLASHA.

GLASHA. She asks to be paid for having been bothered.

BULYCHOV. Pay her, Kseniya. KSENIYA *goes off.* You'll excuse me, Melanya—I'm tired and am going to my room. Fools are the worst when it comes to making you tired. Come on, Glasha, help me—

GLASHA *leads* BULYCHOV *off.* KSENIYA *returns and gazes questioningly at her sister.*

MELANYA. He's pretending to be mad—I'm sure—

KSENIYA. I doubt it. He's not well enough to play a part—

MELANYA. It's all right. Let him play act. It'll work against him if we have to go to court to dispute his will. Taisya will be a witness; also Zobunova, Father Pavlin, the tuba player—any number of them. We'll prove that the testator wasn't in his right mind.

KSENIYA. Oh, I don't know what to do—

MELANYA. That's why I'm teaching you. Oh, Kseniya! You would marry him! I told you to marry Bashkin—

KSENIYA. Yes—but that was ages ago. And he was such a fine figure. You envied me yourself.

MELANYA. I did? Have you gone mad?

KSENIYA. Well, let's not go into the past.

MELANYA. God be merciful! I envied you, I?

KSENIYA. What about Propotey? Perhaps we can do without him?

MELANYA. Why should we? We've called him up, arranged everything, and all of a sudden—to do without him! No, get him ready, and bring him here. Taisya! TAISYA *comes in from the hall.* Well?

TAISYA. I couldn't find out anything.

MELANYA. Why couldn't you?

TAISYA. She doesn't talk.

MELANYA. What do you mean, she doesn't talk? You should have pumped her.

TAISYA. I tried, but she only spat like a cat—and called everybody names.

MELANYA. What sort of names?

TAISYA. Crooks.

MELANYA. Why that?

TAISYA. She says you want to drive the man insane.

MELANYA. Did she say that to you?

TAISYA. No, to the innocent, to Propotey.

MELANYA. And what did he say?

TAISYA. He talked in funny sayings all the time.

MELANYA. Funny sayings? You ignorant dolt. He's an innocent, a soothsayer, you fool. Go sit in the hall and don't leave the place. Who else was in the kitchen?

TAISYA. Bashkin.

MELANYA. Well, run along.

TAISYA *leaves the room,* MELANYA *walks up to* BULYCHOV'S *door and raps on it.*

Yegor, the innocent has come.

Enter PROPOTEY, *accompanied by* KSENIYA *and* BASHKIN. *He wears shoes of plaited bark and a coarse cotton smock reaching down to his ankles. On his chest are a number of crosses and little icons. His appearance is frightening: thick, disheveled hair; a long, narrow, sparse beard; and abrupt, convulsive movements.*

PROPOTEY. The room reeks of smoke. It chokes my soul.

KSENIYA. Nobody smokes here, Father.

PROPOTEY *moans in imitation of the wind.*

MELANYA (*to* PROPOTEY). Wait, let him come out first.

Enter BULYCHOV *supported by* GLASHA.

BULYCHOV. Well, just look at you!

PROPOTEY. Don't fear. Don't be afraid. (*Moans.*) Everything is dust, everything will pass. Once there lived Grigory, he went up from story to story, then bumped against a roof, and the devil grabbed him and made off!

BULYCHOV. Is that about Rasputin?

PROPOTEY. Behold, the Tsar has been overthrown and ruin is stalking in his realm where sin, death, and stench now reign. The wind is moaning, the slushy roads are groaning. (*He moans. Then points with his stick at* GLASHA.) The devil disguised as a woman is standing by your side—drive him away.

BULYCHOV. I'll drive him for you! Wag your tongue, but know your limit. Did you teach him this, Melanya?

MELANYA. What are you talking about? How can anybody teach a possessed man?

BULYCHOV. Looks as if it can be done.

SHURA *runs down the staircase followed by* TONYA *and* TYATIN. *During the ensuing action* ZVONTSOV *and* VARVARA, DOSTIGAYEV *and* ELIZAVETA *also come down.* PROPOTEY *silently draws figures in the air and on the floor with his stick. He stands with his head bent, as if absorbed in thought.*

SHURA (*running up to* BULYCHOV). What's going on here? What kind of a performance is this?

MELANYA. You keep quiet.

PROPOTEY (*speaking with assumed difficulty*). No sleep comes to the heretic and the clock keeps: tick and tick. If God would, and if he could, it would be good. Whose trouble is it? It's Satan's visit. Play, Satan, play, it's your day. Midnight strikes—the cock cries—the heretic dies—

BULYCHOV. They did teach you to speak smoothly.

MELANYA. Don't interrupt, Yegor.

PROPOTEY. What then to do? What can we do?

TONYA (*in a tone of regret*). No, he's not frightening—not at all!

PROPOTEY. They've killed an ant and are singing a chant. Maybe, we should make merry. So let's dance a bit while we're still fit. (*Stamping his feet and singing in a voice gradually rising in volume, begins to dance.*) Astarot, Sabatan, Ascaphat, Idumey, Neponey. Go and neigh. Carra tili—knock—knock, hit your head against a rock! Hey, wench, what's the stench? Stakes—stakes! Billowing smoke! Satan's playing him a joke. Gon-gon-gon, he is alone. Zakatama, the old witch, holds him tight, the dirty bitch. From carnal lust, the deadly sin, you can't escape to save your skin. Here's Yegor, he looks so sore—

SHURA (*shouts*). Make him go.

BULYCHOV. What are you trying to do, the devil take you? Frighten me?

ZVONTSOV. We must put an end to this hideous scene!

GLASHA *runs up to* PROPOTEY. *Continuing to whirl around, he swings his stick as if to hit her.*

PROPOTEY. Hee, hi, ho, hum! On the run, you evil one—

TYATIN *snatches* PROPOTEY's *stick from his hand.*

MELANYA. How dare you? Who are you?

SHURA. Tell them to go, Father, the whole lot of them. Why don't you speak?

BULYCHOV (*waving both his hands*). Wait, Shura, wait.

PROPOTEY *sits down on the floor, and moans and screeches.*

MELANYA. You mustn't touch him. He's in a trance—in a rapture.

DOSTIGAYEV. For such raptures, Mother Melanya, one gets a swift kick.

ZVONTSOV. Get up and go—quick!

PROPOTEY. And where to? *He continues to moan.* KSENIYA *cries.*

ELIZAVETA. Isn't he clever? He does it with two voices.

BULYCHOV. Go away, everybody—off with you! You've seen enough.

SHURA (*stamping her foot at* PROPOTEY). Get out, you freak. Stepan, put him out.

TYATIN (*taking* PROPOTEY *by the scruff of his neck*). Come on, holy man—get up! (TYATIN *disappears with* PROPOTEY.)

TAISYA. He wasn't very frightful today—he can do it much more frightfully. If you had given him some vodka—

MELANYA. What are you saying, fool? (*She slaps the girl's face.*)

ZVONTSOV. Aren't you ashamed?

MELANYA. Of whom? Of you?

VARVARA. Calm yourself, Auntie.

KSENIYA. My God! What am I to make of all this?

SHURA *and* GLASHA *help* BULYCHOV *lie down on the sofa.* DOSTIGAYEV *watches him closely.* ZVONTSOV *and* VARVARA *lead* KSENIYA *and* MELANYA *away.* GLASHA *follows them.*

DOSTIGAYEV (*to* ELIZAVETA). Let's go home, Liza. Bulychov looks very bad to me. And there's the demonstration going on right now—we must join it.

ELIZAVETA. It's extraordinary how he moaned. It's beyond anything you could imagine. DOSTIGAYEV *and* ELIZAVETA *go off.*

BULYCHOV (*to* SHURA). It was the Abbess' idea—she thought it all up.

SHURA. Are you feeling unwell?

BULYCHOV. She held sort of a requiem mass—over a live man.

SHURA. Tell me, do you feel badly? Shall I call the Doctor?

BULYCHOV. No, don't. That was his own, what that clown said about the Tsar. And did you hear him say: If God would, and if he could—But God cannot.

SHURA. You should forget all that.

BULYCHOV. Don't worry, I will. Go see what they're doing in there—I don't want them to do anything wrong to Glasha. Why are they singing in the street?

SHURA. Don't you get up. (*She hurries out of the room.*)

BULYCHOV. And the kingdom reeking of stench will go down in ruins. I can't see anything. (*He rises to his feet, holding on to a chair, and rubs his eyes.*) Thy kingdom—what kingdom? Nothing but beasts! Thy kingdom— Our Father which art— No—it's all wrong. What sort of father are you to me, if you've condemned me to death? What have I done? Everybody has to die? Why? Well, let others die. Why should I? (*Sways for a moment.*) Well? How about it, Yegor? (*Shouts in a hoarse voice.*) Shura! Glasha! Call the Doctor! Hey, somebody come, you wretches! Yegor—Bulychov—Yegor—

SHURA, GLASHA, TYATIN, TAISYA *rush in.* BULYCHOV *almost falls into their arms.* GLASHA *and* TYATIN *support him, while* SHURA

runs to the window and opens it. Strains of a revolutionary song, being sung by a crowd, burst in.

BULYCHOV. What's that? A requiem mass—again a requiem. Shura, who is it?

SHURA. Come over here—look!

BULYCHOV. Oh, Shura—

CURTAIN